Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai Volume 03

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These are novel illustrations that were included in Volume 3

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これまで携帯電話を使う機会がほとんどなかったのですが、最近↑の著者近影用ＱＲコードがちゃんと読み取れるかチェックするという大事な役目ができました。やったあ。

【イラストレーター】

ブリキ

家から65メートル程の公園に行くだけで息が切れます
……歳ですね。

カバーイラスト／ブリキ　装丁／blue

MF文庫 J
ひ-02-21

僕は友達が少ない③

平坂読

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僕は友達が少ない③

友達作りを目的とした残念な部『隣人部』が誕生して一ヶ月。努力の甲斐もなく、羽瀬川小鷹たち隣人部の面々は誰一人友達ができることなく夏休みを迎えてしまった。様々なイベントを経験し、友情が深まる——リア充たちがますます繁栄する季節、夏。来てしまったものは仕方がないということで、まだ見ぬ「友達と一緒に楽しく過ごす夏」の予行演習のためにプールに行ったり合宿をしたりする隣人部のメンバーたち。果たしてその成果はあるのか、そもそもそんな練習に意味はあるのか…… !?　露出度アップなのに残念度もアップの残念系青春ラブコメ第三弾、夏こそホットに残念！

MF文庫 J 平坂読の本

ホーンテッド!①～④［イラスト：片瀬優］
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僕は友達が少ない③［イラスト：ブリキ］

僕は友達が少ない
3
平坂読
【Illustrator ブリキ】

……ふん、
まったく生意気な肉だ

三日月夜空
《 みかづき・よぞら 》
残念

柏崎星奈
《 かしわざき・せな 》
残念
あんたホントに外道ね……

隣人部海にて

隣人部 夏休みの風景

隣人アシュタロス観察記録

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肉
犬

危険

Prologue: Farewell

My father told me that we were leaving for a distant town in two weeks, back when I was still a first grader.

That was the first time I'd ever moved, and ever since then I've moved more times than I could count.

My father was an archeologist, and as such was usually running around the country doing his work, so our house was empty more often than not.

Soon after Kobato was born our mother died, and that was when our dad stopped his field work immediately and dedicated himself to raising Kobato and I.

I might be biased since I'm his son and all, but I do think he cares about his family.

I mean, when mom was pregnant with me he was aware that he wasn't around often, and he worked his ass off to buy "a nice house where my lovely wife can raise our children in a town she's comfortable with."

He looks pretty sloppy and has an iffy personality, but he's a skilled and well-known scholar, and had people come to our house to see him quite a lot.

I actually really liked seeing Dad talking about a bunch of complicated stuff with the foreigners and people far older than him who came to see him.

I used to have childish thoughts about him too. Stuff like being at home all the time must've been hard and didn't suit him.

I suppose that's why whenever he said we were moving, I'd always just think to myself "So it's that time again huh" and nothing else.

"You'll have to change schools. Sorry Kodaka." is what he told me with an apologetic look on his face.

I'm pretty sure a little half-hearted "Uh-huh" or "Oh?" was the extent of my reaction to hearing that.

It's not that I was holding back for Dad's sake, I just didn't really care whether I had to change schools or not.

Not like I had any friends there anyway.

...But.

Although I couldn't have cared less about changing schools, having to leave my friend was painful.

Back then, I had just one person I could call my friend.

I could probably even call him my best friend.

He helped me out when the rest of the class was picking on me, and although for some reason we had a little fight right after, we became friends.

It went something like, "You're not half-bad." "Same to you."

Every day as soon as class was over I ran out of school, and hung out with a boy who I assumed went to a different school.

We talked, played games, pretended to be super heroes, pretended to go on explorations, ate sweets, drew stuff, and one day we fought with two of the bullies from before who came back for revenge.

Spending time with him was worth far more to me than something like having 100 friends at school.

I'm sure that he felt the same way.

And that was exactly why I couldn't say it.

A day went by, then three, then a week, but I still couldn't tell him I was leaving this town.

I stayed like that, unable to tell him a thing about me moving out of town.

However, I think it was about two days before I had to leave when I told him "I've got something important to tell you tomorrow, so you better be here."

He nodded, and while I'm not sure why, he had a serious look on his face and told me "In that case, I've got something important to tell you tomorrow too, Taka."

We each promised to tell the other "something important" and went home for the day.

The next day.

I opened to doors to my classroom and had a "Hasegawa Farewell Party" that nobody really could've cared less about. It ended quickly and I ran out of the school as usual, headed towards our meeting spot in the park.

I never saw him. I waited an hour, two hours, but he never came. I waited until the sun was all the way down, but he still never came.

...And so I left town, without saying a word about it to my one and only best friend.

Even now, 10 years later, it's still a bitter memory for me.

The day I recalled that farewell was the first day of September in my second year of high school.

The day after the end of summer break.

The Feeding of the Little Girl

The first day of summer break.

We all agreed to keep on meeting over the summer break, but now that I think about it we never picked out a time or anything, so I just went with the usual routine and headed for the clubroom around the time school would normally end.

It takes me, Kodaka Hasegawa, roughly 40 minutes to get to school by taking the train and then hopping on a bus.

For me, who had never been in a club up until now, going to school on a day off just for club activities had a rather refreshing feel to it.

I got off at the bus stop right in front of our school.

I cringed a bit as I got off the bus and was hit with a muggy wave of heat.

Today's a real scorcher, it's gotta be over 86 degrees.

Actually, I was planning on taking my little sister, Kobato, with me today, but she was drenched in sweat the second we got outside and said "Kh... Accursed sun... Kukuku... Just wait, one day soon us denizens of the night shall swallow this world in darkness..." or something like that, as she retreated back into the house.

I guess going outside in this sweltering heat wearing all black was too much for her. Not that that's surprising or anything.

By the way, I was wearing my uniform.

The campus and chapel are both open to the general public, so I probably would've been fine wearing my normal clothes, but I threw on my uniform just to be safe.

Anyway, I quickly walked my way over to the clubroom.

To lounge #4, located in Saint Chronica Academy's chapel.

That was the clubroom of our "Neighbors Club".

The Neighbors Club, a club with the goal of "making friends".

We play games, act, play more games, relax and do whatever as we drink coffee and tea, play even more games, practice telling jokes, etc.

Though if I had to say whether or not any of it worked, I'd have to answer in the negative.

In fact, far from any of it working, my classmates avoid me even more than they did before.

But I keep on coming here despite that since, well, I guess it's because this place has a good feel to it or something.

I opened the door to the clubroom while those thoughts ran through my mind.

The room had its air conditioning running, and welcomed me with nice, cool air.

"Ah, Aniki."

The first one to notice I'd entered the clubroom was Yukimura.

Yukimura Kusunoki, a freshman.

He's a guy, as you'd expect from his name, but is also the very image of a lovely young girl, and wears a maid uniform.

It's not that he enjoys cross-dressing (I think), but rather that he was tricked into believing that "A true man will always be oozing out manliness, even if he's wearing a maid uniform," and thus, started wearing it daily.

"Yo."

I returned his greeting and closed the door.

There were three other people in the room besides Yukimura.

The one sitting on the sofa reading a book with a sullen look on her face is our club president, Yozora Mikadzuki.

She's a young girl with long black hair, and the one responsible for making this club.

The one playing galge on the TV in the corner of the room is Sena Kashiwazaki.

She's like a model with her blond hair and blue eyes, and I've heard she's treated like a goddess or something by some of the guys in her class.

The one munching on potato chips one piece at a time is Maria Takayama.

She's a silver-haired little girl who wears a nun outfit, and is also the advisor for our club.

If you add Kobato and I, as well as the other person currently not here, you'd have all 7 of the Neighbors Club members.

By the way, Yozora and Sena were in their uniforms, which made things seem not all that different from how we normally meet.

As usual, Yozora was reading a book, Sena was absorbed in her galge, and Yukimura was spacing out while standing there as still as a statue.

"So you're finally here huh, Kodaka."

Yozora said to me with a voice that sounded like she was in a worse mood than usual as she closed her book.

"What do you mean 'finally'... this is when we always meet."

I'm actually a little early even.

If this were a normal school day it'd be about time for 6th period to end, after which I either have to clean up, bring stuff to our teacher, or stop by the library. Hence, I'm never in the clubroom around this time.

"Hmph, so you think it's okay to come here at the same time even over summer break?"

Yozora said, as though it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"How was I supposed to know... when did you guys get here anyway?"

I asked, to which Yozora replied

"Around one o'clock. Meat was already here playing games by the time I got here."

"Sena-anego's arrival was a short while before that of Yozora-anego's."

Said Yukimura in his soft voice.

"You all got here pretty early didn't you... What about you Yukimura?"

"I was here at eight o'clock this morning."

"Hu-wah?" I involuntarily let out a strange noise.

"Eight o'clock? That's way too early no matter how you think about it!"

That's even earlier than when classes would usually start.

After I said that, Yukimura calmly replied by saying

"It is due to the fact that I would have to commit seppuku if by some chance I were to arrive later than you, Aniki."

"You don't have to take this club that seriously!"

I yelled with all my might, though all Yukimura did was give me a blank stare and tilt his head.

Then, while looking ever so slightly embarrassed, he cheerfully pulled out a plastic bag from his own bag.

...Eh? No way... Yukimura took out a piece of flavored bread and yankee manga from the bag.

"Here is today's meal, Aniki."

"Eh... Uh, I already ate at home before I came here..."

Yukimura's eyes went wide at my statement.

"To think that such a thing would happen..."

"You don't have to go and make me a lunch over summer break too 'ya know."

After hearing that, Yukimura made a face that looked like the world was about to end.

"So what you mean to say is... that I am being relieved of my duties?"

"How do you jump to that conclusion!? ...But, well, I didn't really need the lunches you brought me up until now either..."

"Wha... So I am an unnecessary existence to you, Aniki..."

Yukimura made a forlorn look on his face and looked like he was about to cry any minute now.

Gah, I'm not really sure why, but I feel really guilty about this!

"Ah, no, I need you! Of course I need you! I super need you!"

A fleeting smile rose onto Yukimura's face.

"Your sympathy is unnecessary... Now that it has come to this, I shall end it all by committing seppuku..."

"Argh, this is such a pain in the ass!"

I let what I was really thinking slip.

"Hey~ Hey~ Onii-chan, are you not gonna eat that!?"

Yelled Maria, who had been eating potato chips up until now, full of joy, utterly failing to grasp the current mood.

Her eyes were sparkling as she stared and drooled at the bread in Yukimura's hands.

"Eh? Ah, no..... Maria, have you not eaten lunch yet?"

I asked, to which Maria said,

"Yeah, because you didn't give me a lunch today Onii-chan..."

That lonely look on her face sent feelings of guilt running through me yet again.

Before summer break started, I told Maria I'd make her lunches since she didn't like the way the chapel's food tasted and was only eating candy every day.

However, I didn't even think about making lunch for her on days we didn't have school.

That's when it hit me.

"Hey, Yukimura. Why don't you give that bread to Maria? Actually, I'd be grateful if you could make Maria a lunch all summer break long."

I thought that'd work, but Yukimura's face clouded over.

"Serving two masters is most unbecoming for a warrior... I have but a single master."

G-god this guy is such a pain...

"Yukimura. Maria is, uhh... like my little sister. It's okay for a warrior to look after his master's little sister, right?"

"That is true. No, rather it is a great honor to me."

Looks like he's okay with it.

Also, Maria's face was all red for some reason and she was mumbling something.

"Onii-chan's... little sister... ehehe."

.....?

Well, whatever.

"Lady Maria, as Aniki has instructed me, from this day forth I shall take it upon myself to have the pleasure of preparing a meal for you every day."

Said Yukimura, who then handed the bread he was holding to Maria.

"Yeah! Do a good job with it!"

Maria energetically grabbed the bread, and started looking all over it as if it were some kind of precious gem or something.

"Ohhhhh~~! So this is convenience store bread~~! Awesome! They can fit a piece of bread into this tiny bag! Ohh!? Hey hey Onii-chan! Look! Look at all the ingredients they put into this thing ! Ahahaha!"

Maria showed me the bread along with a ridiculously happy smile.

"Ingredients? Hmm, let's see... uwa..."

I was left speechless.

There, on the wrapping of the "Extra Large Special Deep-Fried Yakisoba Hot Dog" was a huge list of additives that almost seemed to be picking a fight with the recent focus on healthy foods. Food coloring, preservatives, artificial flavoring, you name it and it was on there.

"This stuff'll give you a heart attack..."

I made a frown, but for some reason Yukimura wore a small look of pride on his face and said,

"I chose this specifically for you, Aniki. A true man does not fear something as insignificant as additives."

"That doesn't mean you have to go out of your way to pick out unhealthy food for me you know..."

I hadn't paid any attention to it before, but I wonder if Yukimura's been giving me this kind of bread for lunch the whole time.

I wasn't sure if it'd be okay to let a little kid eat something like this, but when I saw that happy look on Maria's face I couldn't bring myself to take it away from her.

...Well, it's not like its got poison in it, and it is just one piece, so it'll probably be fine.

"Yukimura, starting tomorrow make sure you pick out more healthy stuff for Maria, okay?"

"Understood, Aniki."

Said Yukimura, lightly nodding with a tiny smile on his face.

I was a little worried whether or not he really knew what I wanted him to do.

"...Hmph, you'll be in for a lot of trouble if you let your pet dog get too used to luxuries like that," mumbled Yozora.

Maria, who was hugging the bread as if it were her treasure while jumping and tumbling around the room going "Wafu~n Wafu~n ♪" certainly did look very much like a little dog.

History

The second day of summer break.

Yozora complained about me being late yesterday for showing up at the time we normally meet, so today I headed for school right after I finished eating lunch.

Seeing as how today was just as hot as yesterday, Kobato opted to stay at home again.

I arrived at the clubroom just a few minutes past one o'clock.

The only one in the room was Yukimura.

"Excellent work as always, Aniki."

"Yo. ...I didn't actually do any work today though."

While making a quick jab at Yukimura who was bowing his head at me as though I were some boss of a yakuza gang who just got out of prison, I asked,

"Where's everyone else?"

"Both Sena-anego and Yozora-anego have yet to arrive, and Lady Maria is occupied with her work as a sister today."

"I see... Did you give Maria her food?"

"Yes. As per your instructions, I ensured that it was healthy as well."

"Ohh? What'd you give her?"

"A substance known as protein. I have heard it is quite good for you."

There was a bottle of protein pills sitting knocked over on top of the table.

I can't deny that it's good for you, but...

"Why do you always have to go to one extreme or another!?"

I yelled, and took the bottle in my hand.

It was completely empty.

"...Did Maria eat all of this?"

"Yes. She did not seem to be very pleased with it, but I was ordered to feed her by you, Aniki, so I had no choice but to harden my heart and force her to eat it."

"You're kidding me..."

I couldn't really imagine little Yukimura forcing Maria to finish an entire bottle of protein pills.

Then, with a meek look on his face, Yukimura said,

"...I now understand the feelings Hideyoshi Hashiba had when Manpukumaru*V* was executed."

"Manpukumaru?"

"He was the eldest son of Nagamasa Asai, after his father's defeat at the hands of Nobunaga Oda, he was then crucified by Hideyoshi under Nobunaga's orders. He was but a 10 year old boy ."

"...A 10 year old kid huh... I feel bad for him."

By the way, Maria is 10 years old too.

"Yes. I believe that Manpukumaru's screaming and shouting was very similar to Maria's."

"They sounded similar!?"

"...Starting tomorrow, don't worry about making it healthy, go for a normal taste... Try to give her something more normal than a bottle of pills, you know, something that she'd actually want to eat. We're not in the Warring States era anymore, there's no need to repeat the tragedy of Manpukumaru."

"Very well, leave it to me."

The only thing good about that was the fact he listened to me.

"...You do know what I mean, right?"

While thinking about the various tragedies in history, I sat down on the sofa.

I figured I might as well kill some time until Yozora and the rest get here, so I took a book out of my bag and started reading it.

...but, I couldn't really settle down.

I turned around, and saw Yukimura standing there with his poker face just staring at me.

"...Yukimura."

"Yes, is there something you require of me?"

Yukimura asked me, with a happy tone to his voice for some reason.

"Ah, it's just, I can't really calm down so can you stop staring at me?"

As I said that, Yukimura went from happy to sad in an instant.

His facial expression didn't change much, but I could feel the entire atmosphere around him change.

"Might I, be a bother to you?"

"No, it's not like you're bothering me..."

"If there is anything unsatisfactory regarding my behavior I will fix it immediately, so I beg you Aniki, please allow me to stay by your side."

"Uu..."

Gh, he's being as ridiculously over-formal with me as always, but when he looks at me with those teary eyes it makes me feel like I just did something awful!

"...You can do what you want."

I said, exhausted, to which Yukimura's face brightened up like a light bulb.

And so, while having Yukimura's red-hot stare bore its way into my back, I finished reading my novel at which point it was already a little past six o'clock.

"So nobody ended up coming huh... Might as well go home I guess."

I got up off the sofa.

"See you tomorrow, Aniki."

"Yep."

I parted ways with a slightly sad looking Yukimura, and started my trek back home.

The Silent Phone

The third day of summer break.

"Hey, you guys. Why didn't any of you come yesterday?"

I, who had just arrived in the clubroom around 3 o'clock, asked my fellow club members.

By the way, today both Yozora and Sena got here earlier than me.

"Kodaka-senpai, were you lonely because you weren't able to meet Rika?"

Said the girl wearing a white robe over her school uniform with a little smile on her face for some reason.

Rika Shiguma, Freshman.

She's apparently a genius, though you'd never guess it by how crazy she is about ero doujinshi... especially how she acts like an insane person when it comes to mecha x mecha stuff.

She's one of the members of the Neighbors Club.

Yukimura was also in the room.

Kobato was being a hikkikomori as usual, and Maria wasn't here.

"I wasn't really lonely or anything, just wondering..."

"Hmph, I had things to do yesterday."

Said Yozora unconcernedly.

"Stuff to do huh... Guess there's no helping that..."

Next was Sena (whose eyes were bloodshot for some reason) who said something.

"I was really busy yesterday too."

"Busy?"

"I figured I'd reach the ending soon and then go to the clubroom , but it ended up taking four more hours than I thought it would. It was a really moving ending though, so it evens out. That scene where Mikan scores a goal was just so..."

Her eyes started to water up, and she sniffled her nose a bit.

I'm not really sure, but I guess she got so involved in her game she didn't come here.

"I'll lend it to you sometime, so you better play it Kodaka. You'll be wasting your life if you don't."

"...Sure, if I feel like it."

Now that I think about it, I got the Masaru (the protagonist's guy friend) end in that "Tokimemo" game she lent me (made me take home) and never played it again.

"Also, the theme song is super good. We should make it our national anthem! When you start the game again after finishing once you can totally feel how it connects to the last scene, and-"

"B-by the way!"

I quickly tried to change the subject, since if I don't stop her now who knows how long I'll have to put up with her going on and on about her galge.

"What."

Sena made an annoyed look on her face.

"Hn?"

Yozora looked over here too (as she put on a face that looked like she thought Sena's ramblings were annoying as all hell, and quietly reached out for her fly swatter).

Rika and Yukimura both looked over at me too.

"To make sure nobody ends up coming here and killing time when nobody else is going to show up, I think we should come up with a way for us to know when everyone else is coming."

"...Hmph. You may be right."

Yozora gave her approval of what I suggested.

"Not a bad idea considering it's you, Kodaka." said Sena.

"So, what specifically should we do?"

"Eh? Hmm, I'm not sure..."

I didn't really think it out farther than that.

"What about using a BBS on the web? We can get one for free, right?"

I threw out the first thing that came to mind.

"Rejected." "No way."

Yozora and Sena said at the same time.

"You hardly even thought about it!! Why can't we use one!?"

Yozora and Sena both made faces that showed a deep disgust from the bottom of their hearts.

"...It's my personal rule to not use the internet for anything other than researching things and shopping."

"It is?"

That was kind of unexpected, but at the same time maybe it wasn't.

"That's how I do it now..... I'll never do that again."

Yozora said, with a sad little look on her face.

"...I won't bother asking what exactly it was that you did."

"...Thank you."

Yozora gave me an honest thanks.

She must really regret whatever it is that she did.

"I've had bad experiences with them before too."

Sena said.

"...Ahh... Just remembering it pisses me off! Those guys... that damn 'Yasuo' and 'Parko' and 'rikiya' and 'Mai-tan(*^`*)HaaHaa'...! I hate that damn moderator who banned me from that one fansite because he thought I was a troll too! Those assholes can all go die!"

"...Did you get into a fight with them on some BBS or something ?"

"I had to, those damn morons called my lovely Natsumi a dumbass muscle-brain! Like hell I'd let them get away with that! You know, Natsumi might seem like that, but she's actually really delicate!"

Sena was getting louder and louder.

I don't have a clue what you mean if all you tell me is "she might seem like that".

The one thing I can say for sure is that it's some character from a galge.

"Well, people are going to have their own likes and dislikes. Not much you can do about it..."

"Haa? That's fine if you keep it to yourself, but if you're gonna make fun of Natsumi in front of a fan of hers like me, that's the same as a declaration of war! If someone does that, then all I can do is get them to shut up and admit how stupid they were, or die trying!"

It's not like I don't get where she's coming from, but she gets angry way too easily.

"...My battle still isn't over with those damn morons... If I ever meet them in real life I'll kick the crap out of them!"

"A-anyway, BBS's are a no go, right!?"

I interrupted Sena who was quickly reaching critical levels.

"Then how about that thing... nixi. We can send messages to each other without any worries that way, right?"

nixi is a social networking service, and you can use it to write stuff that other people can read and comment on... At least, that's what I think it's like anyway.

Since you can keep the things you write limited to certain people, it'd be a good choice for us all to use to communicate with each other... I think.

"Eh, Kodaka you're on nixi? Then give me an invite." said Sena.

nixi runs on an invite-only system, and thus you can only join if an existing member invites you.

"No, I'm not, but..."

"Hmph, like hell I'd ever join that site."

Yozora looked me in the eyes and gave a reply that was full of pride for some reason.

"Rika isn't on that site either~"

"Neither am I."

Rika and Yukimura both said.

That makes sense, nixi is based on the assumption you have friends to invite you after all...

"So we can't even join nixi..."

A heavy atmosphere filled the room.

"But, you know, nixi isn't the only SNS out there! We just have to pick one that doesn't need an invite!"

I said, but then Rika stopped me.

"Hold on Senpai. If Rika asks her acquaintances in the game industry, I think we can get an invite to nixi."

"Really? Then let's do that..."

"That's fine with me, but..."

Rika said, with her head tilted in confusion,

"But why can't we just use our cells to talk to each other rather than going out of our way to use something else?"

Yozora, Sena and I all stood shocked.

"Cells... Are you talking about cell phones?"

I asked, still stunned.

"Huh? Well, yeah."

The wild idea that a cell phone could be used for anything other than calling home hadn't come within a mile of my thought process.

"...I see, cell phones... Rika... You really are a genius... That's an amazing idea."

"Yeah... I never even considered doing that... So cell phones aren't just for looking up karaoke shops... Rika Shiguma... it would seem I have no choice but to recognize your genius..."

"...It's nice to hear you all think my idea is so good."

Yozora and I showered Rika with praise, calling her a genius and stuff, but Rika looked like she was a little creeped out by it.

"Anyway, why don't we exchange addresses for now?"

Rika took out a cell phone from her lab coat's pocket.

I followed her lead and opened my bag, taking out the cell phone buried within its depths.

I bought it when I got into high school. It's a folding type that doesn't have any particularly amazing functions to it.

By the way, both Kobato and I have had cell phones since we were in grade school, and I'm currently on my 3rd one (I bought my 2nd in middle school).

I gave a quick look at my call log, and every call and text I got was from "Home" and every one that I sent was to "Little Sister".

"Here, I took mine out too."

Yozora hesitantly showed her phone to me.

There wasn't a single ornament or strap on it; it was just your run of the mill black cell phone.

By the way, it seemed like Yozora's phone was at the bottom of her bag too, so it took her a while to take it out.

"Okay, send your infra-red rays this way please."

Rika said, and started casually hitting buttons on her phone.

"Eh- I-infra-red rays???"

Yozora confusedly stared at her phone's LCD, as did I.

What's she talking about?

Is she really trying to say these little phones can shoot out infra-red rays?

"...I do feel like I've heard people talk about how more recent phones are able to exchange data via infra-red rays... So that was all true... Hrmm... W-which is it?"

Said Yozora as she furled her brow while hitting buttons on her phone.

"You're kidding me... When did phones get that advanced..."

Rika looked at me and my astonishment as though I were some kind of Neanderthal.

"Here you are."

The one who said that and turned their phone towards Rika was... Yukimura.

"Yukimura...!?"

"Ah, thanks Yukimura."

Rika and Yukimura pointed their phones at each other for about 2 seconds and pulled them back soon after.

"Yes! Yukimura address get!"

"I have confirmed yours as well."

Said Rika and Yukimura.

An utterly shocked expression rose on Yozora's face.

"I-it can't be, you're done already...? That quickly...?"

"Oh man... Kids these days are something else... I can barely keep up..."

"Ahh... So this is the virtual generation of this digital world we live in... I hear everything is like a game to them..."

"...This must be what people mean by children who don't know the meaning of hard work..."

"That's quite a lot to say considering you're only a year older than us, Senpai..."

Rika made a pitiful face at the three of us shaking in awe...

"People like Aniki who only rely on their own strength don't pay heed to things such as cell phones, do they?" Yukimura said.

...Actually, high-tech girl Rika aside, the fact that even Yukimura can easily use infra-red rays was simply shocking.

I figured he was the type to be bad with technology.

Though, now that I think about it, he didn't seem to be confused at all when we were all playing that "Romancing Saga" game...

"Arghh.... I don't get it! Besides, it's weird for people to know how to use this machine when they don't have any friends! Kodaka! I'll just have to do it normally so tell me your address."

Yozora finally gave up on the infra-red rays.

"Okay. I'm pretty sure that'll be faster for me too."

Uhh, my address is..... about 30 seconds later, I managed to pull up my phone number and e-mail address on my phone's screen.

"Here." I said as I showed it to Yozora.

"Hm.....Ah, went too far. Mu..."

Yozora clumsily fished her way around her phone's buttons, trying to enter my address.

"...Hrmm... This is a pretty complex address you've got here..."

"Yeah, it's because I never changed it since I bought my first phone..."

"......Hm... where are the special characters..."

.....

.....

After a full two minutes, Yozora finished entering my e-mail address and phone number.

"Phew..."

Yozora wiped her forehead, and let out a sigh as though she'd just completed some insanely difficult task.

"O-okay... I'll send you something now Kodaka. An e-mail. An e-mail using my cell phone."

"O-okay...!"

Yozora nervously pushed a few buttons, and then hit send.

About a second later, the words "Receiving Mail" popped up on my screen.

Then, 2 seconds later it went "Ding di~ng" as the default ringtone played.

"I got it!"

"You got it!?"

Yelled Yozora in a happy voice.

The e-mail was titled "E-Mail" and "E-Mail" was written in the message itself as well.

Uhh, I guess this is Yozora's e-mail address.

eternalfriendship2@codomo.ne.jo

I went and added "Yozora Mikadzuki" to my contacts list.

"Ohhh... My first address from someone other than my family...!
"

This is almost like, some kind of momentous occasion or something!

Yozora made a surprised face after hearing what I just said.

"I am? What about the addresses of the people from the schools you were at before...?"

"...I never put them in. At the farewell party there were some guys who said "Gimme your address later," but I never did end up exchanging addresses with any of them..."

"....."

Yozora had a look of sympathy in her eyes, and then murmured
,

"Oh, I see... so I'm your first non-family address..."

A tender smile rose to her face for a single moment.

And then she said, triumphantly for some reason,

"By the way, I've never even added my own family's addresses before. You're the very first ever, Kodaka."

...I don't know what you want me to say to that, Yozora.

"Muu~. I wouldn't have minded teaching you how to use the infra-red rays, but when Rika sees you two having so much fun it feels like we're the ones who lost here..."

Rika said with an unsatisfied look on her face. Then, all of a sudden,

"Hmph, it's just a stupid cell phone."

Said Sena, who had been unusually quiet up until now, as though she were spitting the words out.

"...? What are you mad about?"

"I'm not mad!"

Said Sena, who seemed to be in a bad mood.

"If you say so... Anyway, come on, give me your address too."

I said, which only made Sena look even more angry.

"...ave a..."

She mumbled with her lips pursed.

"Eh?"

"I don't have a cell phone!"

Sena yelled at the top of her lungs, which startled Rika and Yukimura.

"O-oh, you don't have one..."

Sena glared at me and said,

"Just so you know, I'm not jealous of you or anything!! It's not like not having one is a problem for me, and even if I did have one it wouldn't do me any good! Cell phones are what those annoying retard girls in my class use! A noble like me doesn't have any use for one!"

"...Uh-huh... O-okay. Yeah, there's plenty of people who say they don't need a cell phone, right?"

"Exactly! Forget a cell phone, I don't even need a normal phone. No matter where they are or what they're doing, lowly commoners should be able to gratefully accept the angelic voice of a goddess like me!"

"Uh, that's a little bit..."

as I started talking,

Ring ring ring... all of a sudden the phone in my hand started ringing.

"Eh!?"

I fumbled the phone around and saw a number I didn't know on the screen.

I figured I might as well answer it.

"...Hello?"

" 'It's me.' "

I heard a voice from the phone and from behind me.

I turned around and saw that the one who called my phone was Yozora.

" 'Enter my phone number into your contacts.' "

"Ah, yeah okay."

Talking on the phone with somebody right in front of you is so weird.

Yozora kept on talking to me over the phone like that for some reason.

" 'Since we just got it all set up, let's talk over the phone for a while.' "

"Eh... Sure, I guess."

" 'Good. Then let's talk about dinner last night. What did you eat, Kodaka?' "

"Uhh, what *did* I eat..."

As I was thinking I happened to look over at Sena again, who looked even more pissed off than she was before to the point I could almost see her veins popping out.

"Y-you two! Who gives a damn about what you ate yesterday!? Why do you have to go out of your way to talk about that over the phone now!?"

" 'Shut it, Meat. Can you not even shut yourself up while people are trying to talk on the phone?' "

Said Yozora, waving her hand at Sena telling her to go away.

"Khhhhh!"

" 'Still, these cell phones are quite handy. We can even talk when we're not together.' "

"Then use them when you're not together!!"

Yozora completely ignored Sena and continued,

" 'We can let everyone know when we're coming to club with them. Also, let's talk about all of our plans via e-mail from now on. ' "

"S-sure..."

"Ghhhhh..."

Sena was about to burst into tears.

Yozora still kept on talking too, although this time it was with a much quieter voice that you could barely hear.

" 'By the way, about my dinner last night, I had **meat.** Specifically, it was curry with chicken **meat**, and the **meat** was incredibly tender and tasted so good.' "

She carefully made sure to only say the word "meat" at a normal volume.

"Uu~... What are you talking about...!?"

" 'Something that has nothing to do with you Meat. The store I went to didn't have just chicken **meat**, but also had pig **meat**, cow **meat**, and a bunch of other stuff that was so cheap I think we should all **meet** up there sometime. I'm sure you'll all love the **meat** they have th-' "

"Gaaaahh! Shut up, stop saying meat!!!!"

Sena roared all of a sudden, and took my phone away.

"Hey!!"

Sena brought my phone to her mouth and then yelled at the top of her lungs,

"Idiot! Jerk! Retard!!!"

"Kh!?"

Yozora cringed and pulled the phone away from her ear.

Sena shoved my phone back into my hands, and told Yozora " Go die!" before running out of the clubroom.

"...God damn, stupid piece of meat..."

Yozora ended the call while holding one hand to her ear.

"You really know exactly what to do to piss Sena off, don't you.. ."

I have to admit, I was a little impressed by it.

On the bus and train ride home, and even after I got home, I kept opening my cell phone and looking at my contact list.

After Sena ran out, I exchanged addresses with Rika and Yukimura (I even learned how to use the infra-red rays).

Up until now I've only ever had home, Kobato's cell, and Dad's work phone in there, so my contact list easily doubled today.

Crap... I can't stop smirking...

That night, I went to sleep in a good mood,

but...

Ring ring ring...

The phone ringing woke me up.

The phone that was ringing wasn't my cell, but rather our home phone.

I checked the time using my cell I left near my bed, and saw that it was just past 2 in the morning.

"...Who the hell is calling at this time of day..."

I thought about ignoring it, but I figured it might've been one of dad's overseas contacts so I got out of bed to answer it.

I headed downstairs while rubbing my sleepy eyes and picked up the phone.

"...Hello, this is Hasegawa speaking."

It felt like I was being a little quieter than usual.

"H-HEWOO!!"

A voice that sounded like the person talking held the receiver right next to their mouth and yelled as loud as they possibly could rang through my ears.

I reflexively pulled the phone away from my ear and cringed.

W-what the hell...!?

As I thought that,

Ca-lick!

.....They hung up.

"...What the hell, a prank call...?"

Still pissed off at the annoying person who'd make a prank call in the middle of the night, I went back to bed. However, right as I was about to fall asleep again, the phone rang again.

I'm ignoring it.

I told myself that and closed my eyes, but the phone didn't stop ringing even after 20 seconds had passed.

Oh yeah, I never set the answering machine...

Annoyed, I got up again and went downstairs to pick up the phone.

"...Hello."

Even I could tell how pissed off I sounded.

"Eek!?"

I heard a shriek from the receiver.

Huh, where have I heard that voice before...

"...Hello?"

I asked again, and then heard someone gulp and say,

"U-umm! T-this is Sena Kashiwazaki, i-i-i-i-is Kodaka, I mean, Mr. Kodaka available!?"

She was obviously nervous, talking as fast as she could.

"...Eh, Sena?" I asked.

"H-huh? Is this Kodaka?"

"Yep."

I could hear Sena breathe a sigh of relief over the phone.

"You idiot! Geez, don't scare me like that you idiot! Your voice is scary idiot!"

Not holding back on the insults are we?

...This doesn't even make any sense.

"Do you have any idea what time it is right now...?"

"H-hey, more importantly, Kodaka!"

Sena rambled on, perfectly ignoring my complaints.

"What kind of cell did you get?"

"...What kind? It's just a normal one..."

I answered, unsure of what she was asking.

"That. Is. Not. What. I. Meant! It's gotta have the name of the company or a serial number on it somewhere!"

"Eh... The company is U. I don't know what kind it is."

"Then find out."

"Huhh?"

"Just do it!"

"...Fine, wait."

I put down the receiver and went back up to my room and flipped on the lights.

I took my cell in my hands, and found something that looked like a model number.

"Uhh, it's a M61b, I guess."

"An M61b by U?"

"Yeah." I could hear her writing something down.

"Okay, I got it. See you later."

Ca-lick!

Announcing the end of her business she quickly hung up.

Just what in the world...

The next day.

Just before noon I got an untitled message from Yozora that said nothing other than "2 o'clock." so I sent a mail to Yozora, Rika, and Yukimura, my own mail titled "Today", that said "I'll be there around 2 o'clock too."

After I finished lunch, I left home so I'd get there around two.

While I was on the bus, I got a mail from Rika titled "Waiting Naked" which said "I'll be waiting for you naked, Kodaka-senpai♥ Ah, you just imagined Rika naked didn't you? Senpai you pervert ♥"

"...Is she retarded?"

I gave her a quick reply of "retard".

A few minutes later yet another mail from Rika came.

The title was "Ass"... pushing the line with that one.

It read: "By the way, Yozora-senpai is totally naked too (*ノ)kya ~ As proof, I've attached an image of Yozora's cute little butt for you."

"Wha!?"

I let my voice slip in surprise, but after taking a good look at it I could see it was just a picture of her elbow.

...How old is she? 12?

Right after that, I got a mail from Yozora that said "That was Rika's arm just now." in the title field and nothing in the actual body. She must've been flustered when she wrote it. I also got another weird mail from Rika that came at nearly the same time as Yozora's with the title "Iyan♥" that said "Yozora-senpai hit Rika's butt with her fly swatter, Rika can't take it anymore s-stop itttt~~♥ "

I sent Yozora a mail that said "I know." and ignored Rika.

I then got another mail, this time from Rika's laptop, with the title "The Truth" that read "Eh? Yozora-senpai, why are you taking Rika's panties off? Ahn~ I can't stand it, this is too embarrassing! Ahh, Don't lick me down thereee! I can't stop twitching each time I

feel it! Yozora-senpai then whispered into the moaning Rika's ear, ' Here? Do you want it here? You dirty little girl.' She then gently blew on Rika's ears which caused Rika to lose all the strength in her body and (etc.)" I was reading her stupid mail, but the bus reached the school so I got off without finishing it.

Today was as hot as ever.

I entered the clubroom, where Yozora and Rika (who were obviously not naked) and Yukimura were waiting.

Yozora looked exhausted as she lay on the sofa.

Yozora pointed at Rika, and turned only her face to me as she said,

"Watch out Kodaka... she's, a freak..."

She barely managed to get even that out.

"Yeah, well... I already know that." I said.

As for the freak in question, she was currently typing away on her laptop.

It looked like she was writing a novel.

"Ah, Kodaka-senpai! Rika just recently discovered that yuri might not be all that bad! Rika thinks she might be okay with anything as long as it's erotic!"

"You're sure full of energy..."

I sat on the sofa, pitying Rika who seemed like she was about to launch herself into space.

"I have prepared tea."

Yukimura handed me a glass of barley tea.

"Thanks!"

I thanked Yukimura and happily took the drink from him.

Glug glug... I gulped the whole thing down at once.

...It wasn't hot or cold, just lukewarm tea.

"Would you like another?"

"Eh? Yeah, sure."

I took another glass of tea from Yukimura.

...It was warmer than before, but I still gulped it down pretty quickly.

"Here you are, Aniki."

"Thanks. Ah! That's hot..."

The third cup of tea was very hot, and not something I could just gulp down.

I looked at Yukimura, who was looking at me as though expecting something.

He was probably trying to imitate how Mitsunari Ishida gave Hideyoshi Toyotomi a cup of warm tea, then a slightly hot cup, and then a relaxing hot cup of tea to drink.

"...Umm... Mitsunari was a pretty thoughtful guy."

"It is an honor to receive your praise, Aniki."

I praised Yukimura, and he smiled bashfully.

"...But I still think cold barley tea is best. I won't let that one go."

"Is that so..."

Yukimura got a little depressed.

While relaxing and slowly drinking the hot tea from Yukimura, the door to the clubroom flew open all of a sudden.

"Heh heh, so you're all here, lowly commoners! Your goddess has come to you!"

It was Sena who opened the door.

"Ahh, hey." I said while sipping my tea.

Yukimura was stone faced, as usual.

Even Yozora, who'd usually make fun of her, only gave her a little glance as if to say she couldn't care less.

"You're letting the cold air out, can you close the door now?"

Rika coolly said, while still typing on her keyboard and not even looking over at Sena, to which Sena replied "Ah, sorry..." and quietly closed the door.

"I'm gonna get some sleep."

Yozora crossed her arms and closed her eyes.

"Uuu... W-why are you all so lifeless!?"

Sena ground her teeth, annoyed, and then said,

"I wonder, will you be able to stay like that after you see this!? Here, look at it Yozora!"

Sena quickly walked over to Yozora and held out a cell phone as though it were Mito Koumon's seal case.

"Heh, what do you think now? I asked Papa yesterday and he bought it for me!"

Sena said with the face of a delighted child.

"Hmph..."

Yozora opened her eyes a little, and then closed them again, uninterested.

"Huh, isn't that the same as mine?"

Sena's model matched the one I had. It was even the same gold color as mine.

"O-ohh... it is? W-what a coincidence!"

Sena's face turned a little red.

"Uh, no, not really..."

You called me in the middle of the damn night and asked me about it... before I could say that,

"...the same as Kodaka's?"

Yozora angrily said, and glared at Sena's cell phone.

"Hehe." Sena chuckled as though she'd just won some battle.

"Anyway, come on let's exchange addresses! Come on, hurry!"

"Eh? Okay..."

I took out my cell phone.

Yozora groaned as she looked at and compared our phones.

I got ready to use the infra-red rays I learned about yesterday.

"By the way, do you know how to do it this way?"

"Of course!" Sena said triumphantly and pointed her cell at me.

We quickly exchange addresses.

Sena had a big grin spread across her face as she stared at her phone's LCD.

"Haha... Here Yozora, I'll even do it with you."

"I have no need for your address."

Sena got caught off guard by Yozora's refusal.

"Hey! I went and bought one so just tell me your address!"

"...Do you want my address that much?"

"I-it's not like I want it or anything! I don't want to know it at all , but I figured I'd let you exchange with me since we're in the same club! You should be grateful!"

"I see, thank you. I'll make do with your feelings alone."

"I can't call you using my feelings alone!"

Yozora looked at Sena with her eyes full of disgust.

"...Hmph, making such a greedy face... look at this bitch. If you want it so badly then prove it to me."

"Prove it...? Ah, I'm not going to lick your feet, got it~? Uuu~ Fine, forget it, stupid Yozora!"

Sena ran out of the room with a few tears in her eyes.

"...She gives up so quick..."

Whispered Yozora, who looked just a little bit sad.

After Sena left, Yozora and I began reading like we always do.

About 15 minutes later, I got a message on my phone.

...it was from Sena.

"I'm gonna send that idiot Yozora a bunch of spam mail so tell me her address (^_^)"

"...So this is the first mail you send me...?"

And on top of that, Yozora, who was sitting next to me, peeked at it.

"...That stupid Meat..."

A smile found its way to Yozora's face for some reason.

"...Kodaka, let me see Meat's address. I might as well just tell her what mine is personally..."

...It was roughly 30 minutes later when Sena came running back into the clubroom, half in tears, to talk to us about a bunch of mails from an unknown address she kept getting that simply said either "Death" or "Curse".

Sealing Technique, Release!

One day at the end of July, we were still in the midst of a big heat wave, and the air conditioner for our living room broke.

The hot-water heater just broke the other day too, but I guess time was up for the AC too.

And so, today I didn't go to club and instead went on my way to pick out a new air conditioner.

I don't really know what makes an air conditioner good or bad, but I doubt I can pick one worse than the several decades old one we had.

When I went to the shop I had the salesman show me a few of the choices they had, and then made my choice based mostly on how much power it'd use up and how much it'd cost.

However, I guess it takes 3 days at best for them to come and install it for us.

Three days huh...

Well, I do have an air conditioner in my room so it's not like I can't put up with it, but the living room is where the TV is.

I don't really watch much TV myself, but my little sister Kobato has spent every day of her summer break thus far sitting in the living room watching TV or reading her manga.

When I got home after going to the electronics store and buying groceries on the way back, I found Kobato in the living room watching TV.

"I'm back."

"A-An-chan!"

Kobato lit up upon seeing my return.

"The AC! Did you buy us a new AC!?"

"Yeah, I bought one, but it'll take 3 days to get here."

Kobato's face turned to stone after hearing the news.

"T-three days..... Kukuku... Damn useless humans... But, this is interesting... I suppose I shall entertain myself with this purgatorial feast for a short while, kukuku... I am Leysis Vi Felicity Sumeragi... even if my body were to be placed in a 20,000,000 degree heat, a Queen of the Exalted Night such as myself would have no problems with it..."

Her usual exaggerated ramblings.

"...Why don't you change into some lighter clothes?"

A suggestion I've made more times than I can count.

Which Kobato refused, as usual.

"Kukuku... This dress is not normal clothing, it is the material form of my power of darkness... it is not something that can be easily changed..."

"Yeah yeah."

I sighed and walked into the kitchen, and put the food I bought into the fridge.

I then took out a cup of cold barley tea and drank it.

Ahh man, this is the stuff.

"Kobato~ want some barley tea?"

I peeked into the living room holding the barley tea and a cup in my hands.

There was a girl on the TV wearing a red dress that looked like a somewhat simplified version of Kobato's, and a girl in a frilly white outfit that screamed "magical girl" (I'm guessing she's the protagonist) who were fighting each other with magic in the sky.

It had a fast feel to it with magic and explosions everywhere, which made it interesting even if you didn't know the story.

Kobato was entranced by their battle scene.

The fight looked like it was at the climax, and the girl in the red dress got hit by the protagonist's magic and fell to the ground.

It looked like that was the end, but the girl in the red dress emerged from the cloud of smoke.

She looked up at the protagonist girl in the sky, and showed her a smirk full of confidence.

"Kukuku... Not bad for you to push me this far. As a sign of my respect for your valiant efforts, I'll show you my true form...!"

A red light enveloped the girl as she yelled,

"Sealing Technique, release!"

The girl's red dress burned up, and she was naked while being surrounded by the red light.

"Magical powers, unleash!"

A new flame rose up from the girl's naked body, and turned into clothes.

When the light stopped flashing all over the screen, the girl appeared again wearing a completely different outfit than before.

She was in a weird looking leotard with two little openings in the back and in the middle of her chest, and an excessively short skirt. All in all it was a very revealing set of clothing.

"Kukuku... this is my true form...!"

The girl proclaimed, while wearing a bold smile.

The only thing that changed was her clothes, her face didn't even change or anything, but the protagonist magical girl said, "So this is... your true form..." with a look of astonishment on her face.

After that line the ending credits started to play.

Looks like they're going to leave the battle with the true form for next time, I guess. After the ending and preview of the next episode ended, Kobato turned off the TV.

Then, she stood up all of a sudden and ran over to the stairs.

"Ah, Kobato, barley tea..."

She's not listening...

I could hear Kobato's "thump thump" as she went up the stairs and into her room.

...Whatever.

Anyway, I put the tea back in the fridge, and went to the kitchen to get started on dinner.

But, I heard another loud set of thumps and Kobato reappeared on the first floor.

"An-chan!"

Kobato had a skirt and some other clothes in her hands for some reason.

It wasn't her goth loli stuff either. If I remember right it was the sleeveless T-shirt and mini skirt she used to wear back when she was in grade school.

Kobato brought the clothes she was holding in the kitchen and put them down on a chair.

"...?"

As I was wondering what it was she was trying to do, Kobato yelled,

"Sealing Tek, Tek... Sealing Te...chnique, release!"

Right as she finished saying that, she got to wildly taking off her clothes.

...?

Well whatever, I'll get back to my dinner prepa-

"A-An-chan! You have to watch!"

Kobato said to me, who had already turned around.

I turned back around to appease her, and she then took off her headband and ribbon, as well as her big frilly dress and drawers.

She then moved to taking off her knee socks, but they were sweaty and stuck to her legs, which made taking them off pretty difficult.

"Hyah!"

Ah, she fell.

While sitting on her butt, Kobato continued to take her knee socks off.

"Kobato, make sure you put that all in the laundry basket."

"Ah, okay."

The stark naked Kobato picked up the clothes she just took off, and carried them to the laundry room.

She came back with a new pair of panties in hand.

"Magical powers, unleash!"

She yelled at the top of her lungs, put on the panties she brought with her, and put on the T-shirt and skirt she left on the chair earlier.

"Ha!"

Kobato finished changing and let out a little breath.

Kobato, who had now changed out of her goth loli outfit and into lighter clothes, said the following to me along with her standard chuckle:

"Kukuku... This is my true form..."

"...So, you're a copy-cat now?"

"I-I am not a copy-cat!"

Kobato's face went bright red upon having me point out the obvious.

If I had to guess what she was trying to do... Basically, she probably thought of a good excuse to change clothes without breaking her character after seeing that anime.

"Kukuku... To think I would release my true powers like this... This hellish season is not to be trifled with I suppose..."

"...Well, it's fine with me."

Since I don't have to do as much laundry this way and all.

I then realized,

"Hey, Kobato. Those are your clothes from grade school, right? Or am I wrong...?"

"Fueh? Yeah."

Kobato nodded, and I carefully continued talking,

"...If you can still wear your grade school clothes, even now that you're in 8th grade... does that mean you've stopped growing?"

"Fuehh!?"

Kobato let out an utterly shocked yell.

She then slowly went and patted her chest, checked the waist of her skirt, the sleeves of her shirt, and then looked at me with a face that looked like she was about to cry.

"...Whado I do, An-chan... Am I not gonna get any bigger?

"....."

I silently averted my eyes.

It's too painful to look at her...

There are kids who grow up quick and look pretty old when they're still in grade school, but I guess Kobato is the opposite of them huh...

"uu~..."

Kobato's face was petrified from the shock she just received, but she quickly went back to being Leysis and chuckled, "Kukuku..."

"...Kukuku... Now that I think about it, I am a Noble of the Night who possesses eternal life... My body will never wither away into a dekepit husk... It's only normal for me to be this way, yeah..."

"I-I see... good to hear you won't wither away and become dekepit."

By the way, it's not "dekepit", it's "decrepit", Kobato.

"Yeah... Me too..."

Kobato smiled, still seemingly on the verge of tears...

The summer day our air conditioner broke.

Kobato swapped out her goth loli clothes for lighter ones, and started to drink milk instead of tomato juice.

Saint VS Vampire

The day after Kobato stopped wearing her goth loli clothes.

I headed to the clubroom with Kobato who was somehow magically cured of her hikikomori ways after changing into lighter clothes.

The other club members, as well as Maria, were all gathered there.

"Onii-chan!"

Maria came flying at me the second I got in the room.

"Hey, long time no see."

I said while patting Maria's head.

I heard she was busy with work, so the past few days I've been here Maria's been gone.

"Hey, you know what!? Yukimura gave me some tasty food today! He gave me steak yesterday too! Yukimura's a good guy! Oh, did you know this Onii-chan!? Toro tuna is called toro because it goes 'tororo' and just melts in your mouth! Also, that steak was super soft!"

Wha-, Sus-? Stea-....!?"

I looked over at Yukimura in shock, but all he did was show me a proud look on his face.

"You ordered me to prepare delicious meals for Lady Maria, and so I put my heart and soul into preparing splendid meals for her."

"W-well yeah, I said to make it taste good, but don't you think sushi and steak is a bit much...!?"

Yukimura tilted his head as though he didn't have a clue what I meant.

This guy always has to pick one extreme or the other...

...I wonder how much Maria's meals the past few days cost him...

I can't let my juniors pay for me, so every time Yukimura brought me flavored bread and yankee manga, I'd sneak what I owed him into his wallet.

My head hurts just thinking how much this is gonna cost me...

"I prayed to God that God would kick the crap out of this cross-dressing freak that time he made me eat that weird food that tasted like medicine, but now it's different! Thank you, Yukimura!"

Maria said, with a big smile on her face.

"Please offer all your thanks to Aniki, he is the one who deserves it."

"Thanks Onii-chan! I'm super happy that you give me all this good stuff to eat! I love you Onii-chan!"

Kh, when she shows me that smile absolutely overflowing with happiness, there's no way in hell I can tell her "You have to eat lunches worth 300 yen or less from now on"...!!

As I was thinking that,

"Uu~...! Moron! Moron! Moron!"

Kobato came and stopped Maria from clinging all over me.

"You can just keep eating and turn into a fat pig, and then have An-chan hate you!"

"W-what did you say!?"

Maria turned to face Kobato, and made a confused look on her face.

"...? Who are you?"

"I'm An-chan's little sister!"

"Hmm?"

Maria tilted her head and stared at Kobato's face, before finally yelling "Ahhh!" in shock.

"You're that vampire! Why is a vampire here!? You tricked me, didn't you!"

I'm guessing Maria didn't recognize Kobato as Kobato now that she's in a normal T-shirt and skirt.

"Eh? Ah... H-... Hmph... You poor, easily deceived fool... Kukuku... Your cross and sunlight are no match for the Queen of the Exalted Night..."

Kobato sure got into a good mood quick.

...I'm pretty sure it's because she knows Maria's pretty much the only person in the world who'll treat her as a real vampire.

"Khh! I let my guard down because you were gone for a while! You abominable incarnation of darkness! I'll destroy you with the power of God again!"

Maria took out her cross and lunged at Kobato.

Thwack! Thwack!

The cross hit Kobato square in the forehead, which brought her half to tears.

"————!! Y-y-y-you! That's against the rules! Why are you still swinging that thing around when I told you it has no effect, you damn simpleton! Ugaaa!!"

Kobato bit Maria's arm in retaliation.

"Gyaaaaa!?"

Maria let out a scream and backed away from Kobato.

"Uu~! You bit me! The vampire bit me! Why did you bite me, you moron retard piece of poop!"

"What do you expect a vampire to do..."

Said Kobato to Maria, who was on the verge of tears.

Kobato then declared, while chuckling,

"Kukuku... Did you know, you abominable pawn of God...? Those who are bitten by vampires become a vampire themselves... Kuhahahaha, with this, you are now my loyal servant...!!"

"Ehhh!?"

Maria was thrown into disarray by Kobato's words.

"Ha, that's not true, right Onii-chan!?"

"...I have heard people say that before."

Wait, wasn't it when you have your blood sucked rather than being bitten?

I'm pretty sure there are stories where humans become vampires by drinking vampire blood too.

"Uwaahhh! I'm a vampire nowww!"

Yozora made an utterly annoyed face at Maria's wailing.

"...Maria. If you go out and stand in the sunlight for a good while right after being bitten, you won't turn into a vampire."

"Really!?"

Yozora's halfhearted words filled Maria's eyes with hope.

"Yes, really. I say nothing but the truth."

Yozora, only you can tell such a boldface lie with a straight face like that.

Yozora showed a compassionate smile to Maria.

"Go on, run around the school and bask in the sunlight before it's too late!"

"I got it! Thanks Yozora!"

Maria nodded with a smile... Don't fall for that stuff so easily...

"Also, it won't work if you have your clothes on, so do it completely naked!"

"Okay! I'll go run around naked!"

Maria made a plip plop sound as she ran out of the clubroom.

"...Wow... Not the sharpest tool in the shed is she..."

Yozora looked bewildered even though she was the one telling the lies.

"...You're seriously evil... Although I do worry about Maria being so naive too."

Sena said with a look of pity on her face.

She then started staring at Kobato.

"Kfu-"

"W-what... It's rude of a lowly denizen of the day to stare at me so..."

Kobato told Sena, with a vigilant look in her eyes.

Sena had a huge grin on her face, and her eyes were replaced with a pair of hearts (like this: ♥).

"Hey~ Hey! Why did you stop wearing your goth loli clothes Kobato? Trying a new look?"

"...I-I released my true powers to prepare for the upcoming battle with God..."

"Ahn! I have no idea what you're talking about, but you are so C. U. T. E.! Even if you change your clothes you're still so cute it hurts~~♥"

"Uu~..."

Kobato hid behind my back, almost in tears.

Then, as if Kobato's scared reaction was exactly what Sena wanted,

"Auuuuu!♥ Just what in the world are you made of, you're seriously way too cute!! Hey hey, Kobato-chan, why don't you become my little sister!?"

"Uuu... An-chan..."

Kobato is utterly terrified.

On top of that, even Rika came over to us going "Haa Haa" and breathing heavily.

"Uehehe~... Hey there little girl, what kind of panties are you wearing today?"

"Just how much of an old perv are you!?"

I yelled at Rika at full force, but all Rika did was show me a full-on pervert smirk on her face.

"Seriously, you two Hasegawa siblings are right in my strike zone... Hehe, come on you two, let's get naked together~♥"

"Haa Haa... How do I get a Kobato end...?"

"...Cut it out already, you two freaks."

Smack! Slap!

Yozora, who still looked irritated, shut the two perverts up with a few smacks from her flyswatter.

Anyway, that's how everyone met summer mode Kobato for the first time.

Also, this is sort of unrelated, but on the way home we saw Maria sitting seiza style in the chapel's detention room wearing a sign around her neck that read "I performed a lewd act. I'm sorry."

Jaws

It was now August.

As usual, it was insanely hot outside.

Kobato and I went to the clubroom, and found the rest of the club members lazing around inside the nice cool clubroom.

"Not that it's anything new, but you guys sure laze around a lot in here..."

I said while grabbing my summer homework from my bag, after which Yozora, who was lying lifeless on the sofa, opened her eyes.

"Because it's so damn hot outside... and there's nothing to do anyway."

The fact that Yozora wasn't exactly an energetic person was something I'd learned long ago, but she seemed to be even less energetic ever since summer break started.

"What about your homework?"

"Isn't it obvious I already finished?"

Yozora coolly replied.

"You really are amazing when it comes to academics..."

I'm pretty sure she always studies beforehand and reviews the material after class, and when you combine that with her already high academic abilities, it's easy to see how she can answer any question asked in class like it was nothing.

"Hmph, not like there's anything else to do in school besides study."

"Don't be so cynical... Though I *am* in the same position you are. "

I think that for people without friends, school really is a boring place to be.

"If you ask me, this school needs to give out more summer homework than this. I think about ten times as much would do."

"Gonna have to pass on that."

I was taken aback by how ridiculous what Yozora just said was. I don't know how much schools generally give out for summer homework, but this place gives out twice as much as my last one.

If I didn't have so much free time I'm confident that the amount of work we have to do would bring me to tears.

"Kodaka... How do other people usually use all of this free time we get?"

"Usually going places with friends and stuff..."

"....."

Yozora fell into a silence full of displeasure, and then said with a sigh,

"...Those normals should all just go die."

She had a heavy look in her eyes.

Then, right after that, I heard a cheery BGM and the voices of several girls coming from the TV in the corner of the room.

"...I wonder if they can go die too."

"Don't start getting angry at fictional characters now. That's pretty creepy to be honest."

"What are you talking about? It's precisely because they're in a game that I should kill them as much as I please. If I were the one who made that game, let's see... I'd have a shark come out or something."

"A shark!?"

"Hold it Yozora, what did you just say!?"

Sena turned away from her game and looked at Yozora.

I guess she was listening to us.

"If a shark came out all of a sudden and devoured those annoying women on the screen right now I'd have no problem

claiming that game is one of the best there is. You think that'll happen?"

"As if a retarded event like that would happen! Besides, this isn't even at the beach. They're at a pool! How in the hell would a shark show up in a pool!?"

"Yes, but you can't say it's impossible."

"It's impossible! Idiot!"

"Hrm... too bad."

Yozora honestly looked let down upon hearing that.

"Sheesh. Your head is always full of stupid crap like that."

Sena said, seemingly somewhat surprised, before returning to her game.

The girls were running around giggling, splashing water on each other, and playing with their beach ball like before. However all of a sudden,

"Kyaaa! A shark!"

One of the girls on the screen let out a terrified shriek.

The BGM changed to an eerie one, and a graphic of a shark fin coming across the water appeared on the screen.

"Huh?"

Sena was startled by it for a second, but she quickly bounced back with a "Ohh?" and said,

"I bet it's just gonna turn out to be a fake anyway. It'll be one of the doctor's robots, or Marina using a remote control fin, or someone in a costume or something. It's just a cliché event."

Sena confidently continued reading, and then,

"Uwaa! Why is there a real great white shark here!? Gyaaa!"

"Seriously, why the hell!?" Sena yelled.

There was a pretty realistic looking graphic of a great white shark opening its vicious jaws and attacking the people in the pool drawn on the screen.

"I-it'll still be okay! This is a love comedy after all! It's not like having something dangerous like a shark show up all of a sudden in a comedy is unheard of! I bet the protagonist is going to defeat it and raise his affection points with all the girls! Ahaha, that's right, I know exactly how this is going to end!"

And so the next line came

Snap!

"Ghhgyaaaaahhhhh!!!!"

The screen was dyed red.

The first victim let out their final scream.

A series of gruesome depictions of the characters being attacked continued to flow on the screen, without so much as a hint of it being a gag like Sena suggested.

The great white shark now turned its gaze to the other heroines, still in the bloody pool.

"Hold on! Don't worry, I'll take care of that stupid shark for you! "

The protagonist "Sena" hurriedly tried to save the girls, but was too late.

"Noooooooooooo!!!!!!!"

"Mizukiiiii! (The protagonist's line. Unvoiced.)

"Noooo!! Mizukiii!?"

Sena screamed.

The screen was dyed in blood.

It wasn't long before the rest of the heroines, along with the protagonist, all fell prey to the great white shark.

BAD END

Sena stood there with her mouth wide open in shock.

Yozora looked shocked too, but she eventually managed to spit out a "...Hmph. Well, I guess it was a good game after all." with a cold sweat running down her face.

"Like hell that was a good game! Even calling this game a pile of shit would be too much for it!"

Sena yelled, angry to the point that you could see the veins on her head. She then ripped the disk out of the PS, and without so much as a millisecond of hesitation, snapped it in two.

"Haa.... Haa...!!"

She threw the disk into the garbage, and flopped down on the sofa while hanging her head.

It was then that Rika unconcernedly asked,

"Were you playing 'The Tale of Saint Jaws Academy' just now by chance?"

"...Yeah, what about it?" said Sena.

"I see, so it really does have those crazy bad ends like I heard about. That game plays like a normal harem love comedy, but if you mess up with the flags then you'll quickly get thrown into a bad end. On top of that, those bad ends all involve a shark, or air raid, or murderer showing up and brutally killing everyone regardless of how little they fit into what was going on. Thus, among the core fans of galge it's known as being one of those 'so bad it's good' games."

"I-I see... There's a lot to the world of galge isn't there..."

A terrified look rose on Sena's face.

"...I always knew you two were total freaks."

Yozora muttered while looking at Sena and Rika in disgust.

Sena ignored Yozora's words, and then said while wiping the cold sweat from her brow,

"Haa... Still, I really wanna go to the pool..."

""Huh?""

Yozora and I both said, dumbfounded.

"W-what?"

Yozora looked a little creeped out by Sena, who looked puzzled, and then said,

"Why are you saying that right after seeing a scene of a bunch of girls being eaten by a shark in a pool... Are you suicidal or something...?"

"H-how does that make any sense!? Why would I be suicidal!? I was just thinking it'd be nice to go to the pool and swim around, since it's summer and all! It has nothing to do with that shitty game!"

"Oh... I was worried since it sounded like you had finally realized your possible use as an edible slab of meat. Thank me for being worried about you."

"Eh? T-thank you...?"

Sena thanked Yozora with a confused look still on her face.

"...I want to go to the pool too."

Murmured Kobato, who was hiding behind me.

"You want to go to the pool Kobato-chan!?"

Kobato said it so quietly even I could barely hear it, but Sena acted like she heard it loud and clear.

"Then let's go! Let's go to the pool together, Kobato-chan! Haa Haa...!"

Sena was slowly advancing toward Kobato while panting, but was hit by Yozora's flyswatter midway.

"Gyau!?"

"You're disgusting, Meat."

I have to agree. She was pretty disgusting just now.

"Hrm... Still, the pool huh... the pool... that place is probably full of normals... I wonder if we'll go to the pool after we make friends too..."

Yozora made a frown on her face, and I said to her,

"How about we all go there together? It'd be like practice for the real thing."

"...You have a point, and it's not like we have anything else to do... So yeah, let's go."

Said Yozora, causing Kobato's face to light up as if to say "Yay!"

"Kodaka-senpai, don't get horny when you see Rika in her swimsuit, okay?"

Rika was probably trying to tease me, but I just wearily replied,

"You're just gonna act like your usual weird self and wear your lab coat over it or something, right?"

"Eh- How did you!?"

"Just so you know, if you really show up like that I'm pretending I don't know you."

"Boo~ I'm going to dazzle you with a super sexy swimsuit then. You'd better prepare yourself."

"Sexy? (lol)"

"You're laughing at me!?"

Rika made an annoyed face, and then said,

"I guess I have no choice but to take this a bit seriously... I wonder what I should go with? Low leg style? A string bikini? A Brazilian swimsuit? Band-aids? Naked? Or maybe something even crazier..."

"...Are you seriously considering those last 3?"

...Anyway, that's how we all decided we'd go to the pool together.

Everyone at the Pool

And so, 3 days later.

Yozora, Sena, Kobato, Yukimura, Rika, and I were currently riding the bus to the pool.

We were headed to the same "Ryuuguu Land" that Sena and I went to before, which has a gym and spa in addition to the water park, making it a pretty nice place overall.

However, despite all that I've heard it's not doing so well on account of it taking about 40 minutes to get there after getting off at the nearest station.

In fact, the place was pretty empty when Sena and I went.

I assumed today would be the same... but I guess I was wrong.

Last time we easily found spots to sit on the bus, but this time it was packed and so some of us had to stand.

Packed like sardines inside the bus, I could see Yozora making a sick-looking face in front of me.

"...Yozora, you don't look too good. You okay?"

I asked since I was worried, and she replied,

"...I feel drunk." with a glazed-over look to her eyes.

"Drunk... wha- huh!?"

"...Not that kind. I just feel queasy being near this many people."

"Ohh..."

I guess she's not good with crowds.

I'm not particularly good with them either, but after years of fighting to get the good stuff during sales at the store and such, I've gotten pretty good at dealing with them.

"...I feel sick..."

"J-just don't throw up on me, okay...?"

"As if I would... I'd never do something... so grotesque..."

"I've got a bag here if you need it..."

"Don't worry. I won't throw up even if it kills me..."

"...Don't give up, Yozora-senpai. Rika's doing her best too..."

Rika, who was next to me, had the same lifeless look on her face as Yozora.

She was wearing her usual uniform + lab coat.

"...Are you okay?"

"...It's rough for a hikikomori to be surrounded by this many people... but I'll be fine. If it comes down to it, I can replenish my energy using your lower half, Kodaka-senpai."

Even her typical vulgar comments have less energy than usual.

"...Kufufu... By the way, Yozora-senpai, the way you kept going on about how you won't throw up really got me turned on..."

"How would that even..."

By the way, Yukimura was next to Rika, but he was just sitting there with the usual blank expression on his face.

He was in his usual maid outfit, and was getting tons of looks from everyone around us.

Sena was the polar opposite of Yozora and Rika, full of energy as she kept talking to Kobato who was unlucky enough to end up scrunched right next to her.

"Hey hey Kobato-chan, what do you want to do when we get to the pool?"

Kobato, who was so close to Sena her head was digging into Sena's chest, said in a quiet voice with an irritated look on her face, "...Swim."

"Ohh, so you wanna swim huh? That makes sense~ Hey, how about I teach you how to swim?"

"...I'm fine."

"Can you swim Kobato-chan?"

"...Yeah."

"What're you good at?"

"...long distance."

"Long distance huh? Long distance is so cool~ I've never done it myself though. Okay! Let's swim long distance together!"

"...No."

Kobato was acting as cold as ever to Sena, but I guess Sena only saw that as one of her moe traits.

"Ahhhh~ That cold side of you is so cute♥ You're totally a tsundere!"

"...uuu, save me An-chan..."

Kobato seemed to hate dealing with Sena from the bottom of her heart.

Sena's mind is getting tainted by galge more and more every day...

By the way, the blonde hair and blue eyes combo of Sena and Kobato (Kobato didn't wear her red color contacts since we were going to the pool today) was attracting as much attention as

Yukimura was, and I could hear whispers from guys every now and then saying "Check out that cute pair of sisters man."

...Sorry guys, but Kobato is my little sister, not Sena's.

A little while later, the bus finally arrived at Ryuuguu Land.

Along the way people got off here and there, and each time I thought I'd be able to get a seat, but sadly more people always came on and each stop made it more crowded than the last.

When we reached Ryuuguu Land everyone left got off at once.

"Kh... we're... finally... here..."

"Uuu~... Senpaii~..."

When we got off the bus, the lifeless pair of Yozora and Rika were clinging to my arms.

That was a little rough even for me, so for these two it might've been as bad as getting tortured.

"Hehe... See Kodaka... I didn't throw up, did I?"

"You sure didn't, I'm impressed."

I gave Yozora my honest praise.

She seriously looked like she was about to throw up more times than I can count...

"Yozora-senpai threw her clothes off...? Haa Haa... Suuuuuu... Haaaaa~..."

Rika took a big breath in and exhaled.

"Uu... Rika hates the bus too... Rika thinks she'll go and make an 'Anywhere Window' or an 'Ume-Copter' when we get back."

"...Good luck. The 22nd century's science is in your hands."

I quickly quipped at Rika since she seemed half-serious, and then looked around us.

I found Yukimura, Sena, and Kobato among the group of people getting off the bus.

They were heading over to us.

The other people were all funneling themselves into a line that went to the Ryuuguu Land entrance.

"There's a ton of people here today," I said.

Sena also said, with a confused look on her face,

"Yeah, it is. It wasn't like this when we came before... Maybe the heat is what lured all these commoners to come to the pool?"

By the way, today was blazing hot like the rest of this summer's been.

The sky was pure blue without a cloud to be seen.

"Kh... Accursed sun... However it's impossible to defeat me in my true form. Kukukukuku... I wanna get in the pool already~"

Kobato said while doing her usual evil chuckle.

"Then let's all get in line."

We all lined up, got inside the building, and went to buy tickets for the pool.

It was then that I realized why it was so crowded today.

There was a sign that said "All tickets are half-off!", and when you combine that with how hot it's been lately it's no wonder so many people are here.

"...We should've come in September instead."

"But, well, at least it's cheap."

I said to Yozora, who still seemed to be suffering from the crowd, but she replied,

"If it's gonna be this crowded then they should've doubled the prices. Stupid bargains and sales like this should be outlawed."

"...I don't think they'd ever do that..."

Anyway, we headed over to the pool.

Yukimura and I went to the men's changing room, while the 4 girls went to the women's.

...It should go without saying that Yukimura (in his full maid outfit) and I attracted tons of attention as we walked over to the changing rooms.

Unlike last time when it was totally empty, the changing room was full of people today.

When Yukimura walked into the changing room, the few people who were busy putting on their swimsuits near the entrance all gave us a shocked look.

"Aniki..."

Yukimura said in a worried tone.

"Do males truly find me to be an unpleasant weakling after all...?"

"No I wouldn't say that's it..."

How do I explain this?

Anyway, first I need to explain what's going on to the people staring at us in here.

How should I do this... yelling out "He might look like this, but he really is a full-fledged guy!" would probably be fastest, but...

...No way. There's no way I can yell at a bunch of people I've never even met before...!

Still, I have to tell them one way or another.

I was totally nervous, but I gathered up my courage, and went over to the dad and his kids who were closest to us, and then said while maintaining full eye contact,

"H-He... Hfg... H... HGRAH!"

...Huh?

It feels like I just yelled some nonsense at them rather than explaining it.

"A-Ahh!!"

Unfortunately, it didn't just "feel" like I did. I totally ended up scaring that dad and his kids away from us.

The rest of the people around us all stopped staring right after hearing me yell too.

The bunch of people who were in our way just seconds ago, were now all facing their lockers or the wall as if they were opening up a path for us.

"That was amazing, Aniki..."

Yukimura looked at me with a gaze full of respect.

"A-anyway come on, let's find a spot!"

I hurriedly grabbed Yukimura and started looking for a place to change.

I saw a pair of open lockers a little farther in, so I guess we might as well change there.

There were two other guys near us when we got there, but they quickly ran out with their swimsuits only half-on.

I can't say I'm happy about it, but at least this way there's nobody around us.

We were in a little corner of the room, so nobody else could really see us changing.

Not that there'd be a problem if they could though.

...There probably wouldn't be a problem anyway.

"Let's get changed..."

"Okay, Aniki."

I took out my swimsuit from my bag, which was a pair of trunks just like before.

I then realized something, so I asked Yukimura about it.

"...What kind of swimsuit are you wearing?"

"Please, have a look."

The swimsuit Yukimura took out, was made of 3 pieces of cloth: two for the bikini, and one for the pareo.

It was a girl's, no matter how you look at it.

"Why do you have a girl's swimsuit!?"

I yelled, to which Yukimura replied with his standard blank expression,

"Yozora-anego told me to wear a women's swimsuit."

"Why would you ask Yozora what swimsuit to wear...!?"

"Anego is my advisor. She said it would bring out my manliness even more than a maid's attire, and that it may be too soon for me, but that I should take on the challenge anyway."

"That's way too much of a challenge!"

He totally trusts Yozora doesn't he...

Yozora probably thinks of naive people like Yukimura and Maria as her personal playthings.

"...Perhaps it was too soon for me after all. I did prepare a male swimsuit just in case however."

"You should wear that one instead," I declared.

"I see. If Aniki says so, then..."

Yukimura's face clouded over a little as he took out a new swimsuit.

"...?"

I knit my eyebrows.

It was a white cloth with a fair amount of volume to it that was clearly different than some kind of nylon or polyester you'd usually see.

"...That's a swimsuit?"

"Yes. It is called a **fundoshi**."

"I beg you, please wear the girl's swimsuit!"

I pleaded with all my might.

"I understand. In that case, please make use of my spare fundoshi, Aniki..."

"I'll be okay."

I politely declined Yukimura, which made his face cloud over again slightly.

"Anyway, time to change..."

"Okay."

Yukimura gave a light nod, and took off his maid apron.

He neatly folded it up and put it in the locker. He then loosened the ribbon on his one piece near his chest, and reached out for the back of his neck.

"Nn.... Nnn..."

Yukimura was trying to unfasten the button on the back of his neck while letting out an oddly seductive voice. However, he was having a bit of trouble.

"Want me to help?"

"Nn... Nnn... please do, Aniki."

Yukimura nodded at my suggestion, and turned his back to me.

I went to undo the button, but I was unprepared for the loveliness that was the back of his pure white neck, which caused my heart to skip a beat.

C-c-c-calm down... He's a guy... A guy...!

"Thank you, Aniki. It is shameful, but I always have trouble with that button."

He gave me a tender smile before moving on to taking his arms out of his maid outfit's sleeves.

A pair of arms so thin and white that you'd never think they were a man's came out.

He continued to undress, allowing the one piece to slide off of him.

"I-I see what you mean, it must be hard to put on and take off a maid uniform!"

Just before it fell low enough to reveal his chest, I reflexively turned around.

"What's the matter, Aniki?"

Yukimura asked, looking confused.

He's a guy... A guy... I repeated to myself, and took a peek behind me, where I saw Yukimura standing there covering his chest with both hands and the one piece down at his waist.

A lovely waist, and a tiny belly button.

"Wait, why are you hiding your chest...!?"

Yukimura's cheeks turned a light shade of red as he said,

"It's embarrassing that my chest is smaller than other men's, so I hide it... However if you would like to see it Aniki, then..."

"No, I don't! Just keep on changing and don't worry about me!"

I turned my face away from Yukimura again, and started to take off my own clothes.

"I understand," said Yukimura

...I-I can't do this...!

I know he's a guy, but I just can't watch him change!

I now understand full well how the other boys in Yukimura's class feel when they change into their gym clothes.

This is way too stimulating for a healthy high school boy...!

I could hear the clothes rubbing against his body as he changed right behind me.

Gahhh! This is just way too much...!

While making sure I didn't so much as catch of glimpse of Yukimura, I continued to change into my swimsuit...

"You're so slow! Why are the guys slower than the girls!?"

Yukimura and I left the changing room and headed for the rinsing area, where we saw Sena with an irritated look on her face.

Kobato was standing next to Sena too. She must be mad because that took so much longer than it did before... I guess I can't blame her.

By the way, Sena was wearing a splendid bikini just like before.

Kobato was showing even more skin than Sena with her red low-rise bikini that had an incredibly little amount of material to it.

She's liked that one ever since 6th grade, but as her older brother I really wish she'd find a new one.

Back when we bought it, she liked it so much that she even wore it like normal clothes at home, so I guess it's not as bad as it was before at least.

"Sorry, it took us a while to finish up."

I apologized to Sena.

As I did, I noticed Sena's gaze was directed to Yukimura behind me.

".....Why is he wearing girl's clothes at the pool too?"

"...Don't ask me."

I told Sena who quietly whispered her question to me.

I took another look at Yukimura, and just like I thought, he looks exactly like a woman. You'd never think he was a guy in a million years.

Of course, his chest was flat as a board, but there's girls like that too...

"Aniki, is there something odd about my appearance...?"

Yukimura bashfully asked while blushing.

"No, you look fine... You looking fine is the problem..."

I averted my eyes from him.

"...Oh right, where are Yozora and Rika?"

"They said they'd rest up and then come or something," Sena replied.

"Probably because of that bus ride... Well, wanna go on ahead and do some swimming?"

I said, to which Sena, Kobato, and Yukimura all nodded in agreement.

We all rinsed off using the showers, stretched our muscles a bit, and then got into the nearest pool.

...We got into it.

.....

.....

"Forget swimming... all we can do is 'get in' like this..."

The pool was unsurprisingly filled with people.

There were people no matter where you looked, and far from enjoying ourselves, it was so bad we'd have a hard time just swimming.

"Damn commoners are so irritating... I wonder if a shark will come eat them."

Sena said, annoyed, in a very Yozora-like fashion.

"...I can't... swim long distance."

Kobato said, looking like she was on the verge of tears.

"I doubt we will be able to swim in this condition."

Yukimura, who was clinging to my arm, didn't seem to be all that upset by it.

"We can probably have fun in the lazy river or on a water slide even when it's crowded like this, so let's head over there when Yozora and Rika get here."

I said, to which Sena agreed.

And so, we "got into" the pool, and waited for Yozora and Rika.

However,

"Ahh, come on! What's taking them so long!?"

Sena yelled, clearly pissed off.

We spent the better half of the past 20 minutes just floating in the water waiting for them.

"I'm gonna go look for them."

"Yeah, good idea."

Sena got out of the pool, and went to find Yozora and Rika.

Yukimura, Kobato, and I did nothing while we waited for her to come back. A few minutes later she did, alone.

"How was it?"

"...I got a text that said they're going home. Sheesh, why did they even come here..."

Sena replied, with a little scowl on her face.

"...And I was even thinking of showing that idiot my lovely swimming figure."

Sena mumbled to herself, sounding slightly let down.

After that incident, the four of us went to the lazy river and the water slides, but the lazy river (which was full of people like everything else) wasn't made for people who want to swim around a lot, but more for people who just want to splash around, which left Sena and Kobato upset. We tried the water slides too, but gave up after seeing that each one had a wait of about 30 minutes.

We were already in low spirits after Yozora and Rika bailed on us, and after all that we hit rock bottom at which point Sena said,

"...Let's go home."

In a quiet voice, to which we all lifelessly nodded in agreement.

...And so, the Neighbors Club outing to the pool met a spectacularly disappointing end.

The one good thing was that the bus wasn't crowded since we went home early.

Demon Astaroth's Arrival!!

The afternoon of the day after we went to the pool.

I got a text from Yozora that read, "Bring your swimsuit with you." and while I thought it sounded a little suspicious, Kobato and I brought our swimsuits to the clubroom.

We ran into Sena on our way to the chapel, so we ended up walking with her.

"That idiot Yozora said to bring our swimsuits, but did you guys really bring yours?" asked Sena.

"Yeah, figured I might as well. Wonder what she's up to."

"I wonder if she's gonna have us go to a pool other than Ryuuguu Land's or something."

"I'm pretty sure it'll be just as crowded anywhere else though."

As usual, today was a scorcher as well.

We quickly walked through the chapel, and opened the door to the clubroom.

There was a horse monster inside.

""A horse!?""

Sena and I both yelled at the same time.

Inside the clubroom was a freak with a horse's head wearing a full body swimsuit with black and white stripes that made it look like something a prisoner would wear.

The head looked ridiculously realistic.

Rika was sitting on the sofa nearby in her usual lab coat, and Yukimura was spacing out in his swimsuit.

A cold sweat ran down Kobato's face upon seeing the horseman .

"...Kukuku... To think I'd run into you here, Demon Astaroth... You must have broken free from the gaol of the underworld after being lured by my now released power of darkness... However the Evil Gate should've been destroyed in the last great war between the demons and the gods... Did you open a new gate to get here? Kukuku..."

"No, kinda really doubting any of that happened."

I made a quick remark on her ramblings, and then stared at the horseman.

There was some long, flowing black hair sticking out from the horse's neck.

"...Yozora?"

"Indeed."

The horseman, aka Yozora Mikadzuki, answered in a voice muffled by her mask.

"What are you doing? Are you an idiot? Brain damaged?"

Sena bluntly asked, and Yozora quickly drew her face closer to Sena's.

"S-stay away from me! You're disgusting!"

Yozora shook her head in front of Sena, who looked pretty grossed out.

"That hurts! He- Sto- I said that hurts!"

Sena had tears in the corners of her eyes after having Yozora hit her on the head with the nose of her horse mask.

"Today is Swimsuit Day."

Rika calmly said after getting off the couch.

Normally she just leaves her lab coat open, but today the buttons on the front were actually buttoned.

From the little opening near her neck, I saw neither our uniform nor a tie, but her bare skin.

"...Swimsuit Day?"

I asked, even though I pretty much knew what she was getting at.

"It's a day where we do all of our club activities in our swimsuits."

Yep, I was exactly right.

"...And why are we doing this again?"

"Because it'd be a waste to have bought this new swimsuit and not have a chance to wear it."

Horse-Yozora said with a sharp tone to her voice.

"It's your own damn fault for going home early." said Sena.

"Well, not like we lasted much longer... It was so crowded in there we couldn't have any real fun."

As I said that, I thought I heard a muffled "phew" from inside Yozora's mask.

"Then this is perfect. You should all change into your swimsuits too."

Yozora said, full of pride.

"...Uh, Yozora, Swimsuit Day aside, why are you wearing that horse mask? And why are you wearing that swimsuit that looks like something a professional swimmer would wear?"

"Is it not embarrassing to show a lot of skin out in public?"

"That stupid outfit of yours'll get you more attention than any amount of skin ever would."

"Hmph, that's what the mask is for. Nobody can see my skin or my face, so it's not embarrassing at all."

So that's how the crazy horse woman was born huh...

"...Good thing you went home right away yesterday. The park staff probably would've kicked you out if you showed up wearing that."

"What? There's no rule that says I can't swim with a horse mask on."

"Maybe not, but I'd bet there's a rule that says you can't bring any weird stuff into the pool."

"What... are you serious...?"

I can't tell what her face looks like, but it sounds like she's actually shocked to hear that.

Anyway, moving on, I looked over at Rika.

"...Well, can't say I didn't see this coming."

I said, and then Rika let out a laugh full of confidence.

"Heh heh heh, I wonder if you'll be able to say that after you've seen what's underneath this lab coat..."

Rika began to slowly undo the buttons on the front of her lab coat.

"This is Rika's swimsuit... I call it the **'Idiots Can't See it Swimsuit'**!!"

"So you're totally nude then!?"

"You always comment on that kind of stuff so fast, that's Kodaka-senpai for you! Now then, feast your eyes on this! On the form Rika wore as she was born into this world!"

Rika threw off her lab coat as if she were some kind of deranged flasher.

"Uwa- C-cut it out, you creepy deranged flasher!"

I hurriedly closed my eyes and turned my back to her.

Rika then mischievously whispered into my ears,

"Just kidding~ I lied♥"

"Eh..."

I opened my eyes and saw Rika in front of me.

If I had to say what it was that she was wearing, I'd call it an incredibly normal looking one piece.

Not that that's a bad thing.

"...So it's a normal one."

I said, to which Rika gave a wry laugh and said,

"Even Rika isn't a big enough pervert to show up naked at a public pool."

"Is that so..."

I totally fell for her lie, since she always acts like one.

"By the way, this is a special swimsuit that'll turn transparent when it gets wet. Rika can now go to a mixed bathing hot spring with Kodaka-senpai, and then catch him off guard when my swimsuit suddenly vanishes and I become totally naked! Then, having lost control of himself after Rika's surprise attack, Kodaka-senpai will give into his ever growing lust and slowly take off his swimsuit before pouncing on Rika!!"

I take that back.

She really is that big of a pervert.

"Well, you don't have to worry about that, since I'll never go to a hot spring with you."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

"No way..."

Rika purposefully hung her head.

Then, the door to the clubroom flew open, and in came Maria.

"Onii-chan!"

"Hey."

Maria came flying over to me, and I patted her on the head.

"Ehehe..."

Maria warmly smiled.

By the way, about Maria's food problem from a few days ago, for some reason Maria herself said that she doesn't need expensive stuff, so now she's having normal lunches of vegetable sandwiches , rice balls, etc.

"Kh. So you finally show yourself, abominable pawn of God... Remove yourself from my clansman...!"

As usual, Kobato tried to peel Maria off of me.

But, before she could,

"Gyogyah!?"

Maria let out a scream all of a sudden, and jumped away from me, falling onto her butt.

Maria was looking at something behind me.

It should go without saying that that "something" was Yozora in her horse mask.

"A-a monster! There's a monster in here!"

Maria was shaking with fear.

"Relax, that's just-"

"Yozora" was what I was going to say, but before I could Yozora quickly walked up to Maria.

"Gyaaaaaa!?"

Yozora kept on drawing closer to the screaming Maria.

"I, you, devour."[1]

Yozora said in a deep voice, causing Maria's face to become twisted with fear.

"Don't eat me! You can't eat me! I'm too raw! You can't 'cuz I'm too raw!"

"I can eat you if I cook you right."

"I-I-I-I'll still taste bad even if you cook me! I've been eating my vegetables lately! I taste like grass! Like a bunch of vegetables!"

"It's okay. I'm... a vegetarian..."

"Ehh!? Wahhh! I wouldn't have stopped eating steak if I knew this was gonna happen! I should've made myself meat-flavored!!"

"Kukuku... Now go, Demon Astarott...! Devour that accursed pawn of God...!"

Kobato took advantage of Yozora's act... and wait, wasn't it Astaroth?

"Ghhh! S-so you're with that vampire huh!? Stupid, idiot, moron, poop vampire! Go die!"

"Kukuku... The one to die shall be you, oh foolish nun... I'll make you into a tonkotsu soup..."

"I, you, devour. You'll be like a good snack."

"W... Wahhhhh! I'm not a piece of pork or a snack! Save me Onii-chaaan!"

She looked like she was really about to burst into tears, so I lightly hit Yozora on the head.

"That's enough for now, Yozora."

"...Okay."

Surprisingly, Yozora listened to me and took off the mask.

Her long black hair came tumbling out all at once.

"Phew."

It must've been pretty hot with that on even in here with the AC , since Yozora's face looked flushed and there were big drops of sweat on her forehead.

"Wa- The horse turned into Yozora? Why why why!?"

To Maria who was shocked, still not really getting what was going on, Yozora calmly said with a serious look on her face,

"...This is a cursed mask. When you put it on the demon Astarou takes over your mind. I almost lost myself to him."

"Ohh, you have a terrifying thing like that huh~... It must've been scary!"

Maria was staring at the horse mask.

"Oh, my hand has been taken over by the power of darkness."

Fwoosh!

All of a sudden Yozora swung the horse mask down onto Maria's head.

"Gyaaaa!? It's dark, and I can't see a thing!"

"Kukuku... That's proof that the power of darkness is slowly eating away at your holy powers..."

Kobato said to Maria, who was staggering around the room with the oversized horse mask on her head.

"Uuu~! I don't want to turn into a horse monster! Save me!"

"Kukuku... If you want me to save you then swear you'll never go near An-chan again..."

"No! I love Onii-chan!"

Kobato puffed out her cheeks after hearing Maria's immediate reply.

"Sheesh. T-then fine, go and turn into a horse monster for all I care, moron!"

"I don't wanna do that either! I'll just have to beat you until the curse is lifted then!"

No sooner had Maria said that, before making a charge at Kobato.

Bang!

"Bogeh!?"

Kobato looked like she was about to cry after having the horse mask hit her square in the stomach. That impact also caused the mask to fall off of Maria's head.

"Yay! The curse is gone! Kuhaha! You got what you deserve, you little turd!"

"Ghh..... You little, umm... Moronnnnn!!"

Kobato made a lunge at Maria.

"The one who calls others morons is the real moron! You poop vampire!"

"Shut up you poop nun!"

"Okay, you're a moron! You said poop too, so now you're a poopy moron!"

"Then that makes you a vampire since you called me a vampire! "

"Ah, that's right! Then I'm a vampire and you're a nun!? Huhwah? I-I don't even know what's going on anymore!?"

"Shut up moron! As if I can tell what's going on with all your stupid rules either you moron!"

"Then I'll beat you down while you're confused!"

And as usual, Kobato and Maria began fighting with each other.

"Ehehe... Kobato-chan, you're so cute, getting all mad at a 10-year-old♥"

Sena was making a creepy grin while watching the two of them fight.

Then, as if she'd just remembered it, Sena turned to face Yozora and asked,

"So hey, Yozora, if you don't want our swimsuits to go to waste why don't we go to the beach?"

Yozora made an irritated face.

"The damn beach is going to be full of people."

"It'll be fine if we go to a private beach then."

Sena coolly said.

"...And just how are we going to get one?"

"Eh? I have one, did you not know? I've got a private beach and a villa."

Sena, who again said this as if it were completely normal, made Yozora say, "...Tch, this is why you damn bourgeois are..." in a voice full of hate.

"Of course, I only went there once when I was little. It's far away which means we'd have to spend the night, but Mom and Dad can't since they're so busy and all, and going alone wouldn't be any fun."

"So you're saying we can go to your villa and have a training camp of sorts there, Sena-senpai?"

"Training camp!?"

Rika's words made Sena's eyes sparkle for some reason.

"A training camp... it reeks of normals.....Well, it could be useful for us to get some experience with it for when we become normals too..."

"So we're set? We're all going to the training camp?"

Sena said, her voice full of glee.

"I can go whenever, and Kobato's probably the same."

"...Hmph, same for me."

"Rika's OK for whenever too."

"I also have no problems with those arrangements."

"Okay, then it's settled."

Sena quickly said after hearing our responses.

It feels like we just got caught up in the moment and decided to do this, but I suppose we can just do a training camp like we've done with the pool, karaoke, and all the other stuff.

...It almost feels sad how easy it was for a group of us with no friends to arrange our schedules for this.

And so, we decided to go have a training camp out of the blue.

We ended up talking about it and decided to go after Obon was over.

...Honestly, I was pretty excited about the whole thing.

References

1. ↑ **オ**: A line often uttered by demons in the Shin Megami Tensei series

A Visit to Kashiwazaki's Abode

One early Saturday afternoon.

I was reading a book in my room, when all of a sudden I got a call from Sena.

I've sent quite a few mails with everyone about tiny stuff, but now that I think about it this is the first time I've ever actually talked on my cell phone ever since we exchanged addresses that day.

That one time with Yozora doesn't count since it was absolutely pointless, which would make this the first time I've ever had a normal conversation on a cell phone unless I'm forgetting something.

I was feeling a little nervous, but I managed to hit the talk button.

"H-helwo!"

A loud voice rang through my ears.

"...Helwo?"

"Not helwo! Hello, this is Sena Kashiwazaki!"

"Calm down Sena. Your name shows up when you call, I know it's you."

"Eh? Oh, i-it does? That makes sense..."

Sena said in a voice showing how little she knew about phones.

"Why are you so nervous anyway?"

"S-shut up. I can't help it, I'm not used to this."

She said, pouting.

"Well whatever... so, what do you need?"

"Ah, are you free today? Kobato-chan too."

"Yeah... I don't have any plans. I doubt Kobato does either."

"Then come to my place."

"Huh!?"

Sena's nonchalant way of asking me that left me stunned.

"I told you before didn't I? That Papa wants to meet you."

"Oh!"

She's right, we did talk about that back before summer break started.

Sena's father, the chairman of St. Chronica Academy, is an old friend of my father's, and I guess he did a lot to make it easy on Kobato and I when we came here.

"So, can you come?"

"Yeah, but... this is pretty sudden."

"I think so too, but Papa said he really wanted to meet you as soon as possible."

"...Why?"

"Who knows? Anyway you're coming, right?"

"...Yeah, sure."

I gave my okay to go despite feeling a little uneasy about it.

We worked out at what time and how we'd get there, and ended our phone call.

And that's how Kobato and I wound up agreeing to go to the Kashiwazaki estate tonight.

We got on the bus we usually use to go to school on, and went past St. Chronica getting off at the 5th stop instead.

By the way, I was wearing the St. Chronica uniform, and Kobato was in hers as well; though she hadn't worn a it single time ever since we got here due to the fact that it's not required.

Sena said we'd recognize the road to her house "as soon as you get off the bus," and she wasn't kidding.

Right in front of the bus stop there was a road, at the end of which was a small hill filled with flowers, and on top of the hill rested a large western mansion.

A stone paved road extended from us all the way to the house.

There was a kind of ugly looking sign near the start of it that said "Private Property Ahead".

There were hardly any other houses around, and pretty much all you could see was a rural landscape.

This town isn't exactly a big city, but even so it was so different that it'd make you think you weren't even in the same town anymore, or that you'd gone back in time or something.

In any case, it was fairly obvious that was Sena's house.

Kobato and I walked along the road that no car could possibly drive on, and made our way up the hill.

After about 10 minutes of walking, we reached the top of the hill.

The stone pavement went all the way to the entrance of the house.

The main gate was so huge it felt overpowering.

...Where's the doorbell on this thing anyway?"

I suddenly felt nervous again as I looked around for the doorbell, but I didn't see anything that looked like one.

As I did, the door creaked open with a heavy sound.

Kobato must've been scared, because she hid behind my back.

On the other side of the door was a casually dressed man whose appearance didn't fit the western style mansion at all, and a woman wearing a butler uniform.

It was the woman in the butler uniform who opened the door for us.

She was slender, a bit short, had blonde hair, and looked to be fairly young. In her late twenties at the oldest.

Her eyes were the same transparent blue as Sena's.

Her doll-like expressionless face was a little scary.

The man in casual clothes was probably in his early 30's or so.

He had long black hair which was all knotted up in the back.

He was a pretty handsome guy, but had a stern look to his face.

I guess I'd say that when you combine his clothes with his hairstyle, he was a man with the aura of a grumpy old artist.

Having these two appear in front of me all of a sudden, I couldn't help but be nervous.

"U-umm..."

"Go ahead."

The woman wearing the butler uniform invited us in while holding the door open.

She closed the door when we entered the mansion.

It looked like an olden style from the outside, but the inside was a bit different and even had an air conditioner running keeping it nice and cool.

There were a good number of doors and corridors that were connected to the main hall we were in, and there were a big pair of stairs in front of us that led to the second floor.

"...You're Hayato's children, huh?"

The man said in a majestic sounding deep voice.

By the way, Hayato (Hayato Hasegawa), is our father's name.

"Ah, yes."

"I am Sena's father. I currently serve as the chairman for St. Chronica Academy."

So he's...

According to Sena, her looks came from her mother, and I have to agree. She doesn't look much like her dad.

If he's the same age as my dad he'd have to be at least 40, but he looks way younger.

"N-nice to meet you, Mr. Chairman. I'm Kodaka Hasegawa. This is my little sister, Kobato."

I nervously greeted him, still shocked he came down to open the door in person.

"Hrm... You have an impudent face just like your father's."

The chairman said while staring at my face so hard it was like he was glaring.

"This is..."

"Uu~"

Kobato was shrinking up behind me even more and more now that he was staring at us.

"...You're young, but I can see traces of Airi in you."

Airi, the name of our now deceased mother. It looks like I was right about him being old friends with our parents.

"Come with me. Dinner will be ready shortly."

"Please wait a moment, sir."

The butler woman stopped the chairman, who had begun to walk further in.

"What is it?"

The chairman turned around, and the woman coolly said,

"You still have not finished your self-introduction. I believe it is not very polite to have only Mr. Kodaka and Ms. Kobato name themselves."

"Ghh..." For some reason, the chairman let out a groan.

"I am Sena's father, the chairman, and... My name was written on the school's information pamphlet, wasn't it?"

"Eh... Sorry, I didn't really read it over..."

"Gh...!"

I said, which caused him to throw an intense glare my way.

The chairman then looked away from me, and in a tiny voice said,

"Tenma... Kashiwazaki... it's written with the "ten" from heaven and the "ma" from horse."

"...So, Tenma Kashiwazaki then?"

It was a little unusual, but I didn't think it was that weird of a name.

"It's written Tenma and read Pegasus."

The one who quickly added that comment was none other than the butler woman.

"Pegasus?" I asked, and then,

"Do not call me by that name!!"

He yelled so loud I thought my eardrums might burst.

...After that, he made a face that said "Oh crap" and tried to brush it off by clearing his throat... Umm, so it's Chairman Pegasus Kashiwazaki.

Then, while still flustered, continued on saying,

"Ah, well, umm... it's, you know. That name doesn't have much authority to it... so, um, it's like, as chairman here I try to avoid having people call me that..."

"O-okay, I understand."

While still feeling shocked from how different he acted than I thought he would, I can understand how he'd feel so I just nodded my head in agreement.

Pegasus... While it wouldn't be bad as a kid, I'm sure it's not a name many adults would be thrilled with.

"Umm, by the way, are you Sen-... are you Mrs. Kashiwazaki?"

I was 90% sure that she was way too young to be Sena's mom, but I asked anyway to change the topic, and the answer I got regarding the butler woman was,

"No, my wife is currently overseas," said the chairman.

The butler woman made a slight, but elegant bow and said,

"I am Stella, the steward of this house."

"Stew's hard?"

I asked, to which the woman named Stella coolly replied,

"'Steward'. To put it simply, I work as a butler. My family has been in service of the Kashiwazaki household for generations."

"Oh... a butler..."

I somehow found myself staring at Stella.

I knew Sena was from a rich family, but this made me realize just how true that was.

"Please do not stare at me so much, Mr. Kodaka. You'll get me pregnant."

""Bff-""

I, as well as the chairman, both spit a little in surprise.

What a person. To think she can say a line like that without batting an eyelash...

"You are always so... Anyway let's go."

The chairman made an irritated face as he began walking further into the house.

Sena's old man and Stella the steward, huh?

I can totally feel a "Weirdo Aura" coming from them. Now I know where Sena gets it from...

As I thought that,

"Ah, Kodaka, Kobato-chan!"

A voice rang out, and Sena came down the stairs.

She was in normal clothes, but was wearing more modest stuff than the times I've been out with her.

"Yo." I gave her a casual greeting.

"You done saying hi to Papa? Actually, it's pretty rare for you to come down and greet people at the front entrance, Papa."

"...I just happened to be here."

The chairman said with a sullen look on his face.

I'm not really sure what he'd be doing at the front door, but whatever.

"He's been pacing in circles because of how excited he was to finally meet Mr. Kodaka and Ms. Kobato."

Stella quietly said.

"I-it's not like that at all."

The chairman must've heard since he replied in a flustered voice, followed by an "Anyway we're going." as he began quickly walking away.

He guided us to the dining room, and we all took our seats.

The table was fairly small compared to the size of the room, but it does probably make it easier to talk this way.

By the way, Stella was on standby at the big door that we came through to get here.

As soon as we got into our seats, our food was immediately brought over.

The ones who brought it were Stella along with two other girls in aprons (not the maid uniform kind, normal aprons).

"Huh, so they're not in maid uniforms..."

"What, so you really do like maid uniforms?"

Sena gave me a sharp look. Guess she caught that.

"N-no! I just figured there'd be maids too since you've got a butler..."

I quickly tried to spit out an excuse, which Sena seemed to half-accept as she said,

"The only ones who officially work in our house are Stella and Hikawa. The rest are all just part-time helpers."

"Ohh?"

So that's how it is.

"Slurp."

Kobato, who was sitting next to me, licked her lips after seeing all the food they brought in front of us.

It wasn't western food, but sashimi, tempura, and other Japanese food which was kind of surprising, but that didn't change the fact that it looked incredibly good.

"Well then, let's enjoy our meal."

The chairman held a cross in his right hand, gave a quiet "Amen ." and grabbed his chopsticks.

Sena only gave a normal "Thanks for the food~"

Kobato and I also gave a normal "Thanks for the food." and began eating.

It was pretty obvious from how it looked, but it was incredibly delicious.

However, despite it being good, I didn't have much of an appetite.

The main reason was probably the fact that the chairman was sitting across from me with a stern look on his face.

It felt like he'd get mad if you made the slightest noise.

Kobato looked like she was still nervous too, and was slowly eating her food making as little noise as possible.

"U-umm."

I gathered up my courage and started talking to the chairman.

The chairman put his chopsticks down and said, "What is it?"

"Umm... well, thanks for all you did when we transferred in. I bet my father asked you to do a bunch of stuff..."

"You got that right."

"Just as the enrollment season was over and I was finally able to take a break he comes in and says, 'Hey take care of my son and daughter at that school of yours, kay?' which had me so pissed I wanted to tell him to go screw himself. 716 days without so much as a phone call or a letter, and he thinks he can just...!"

I felt just as flustered as the chairman who had veins showing on his forehead.

Dad always told me that he was his best friend for a long time, but could it be that they aren't really that good of friends after all...!?

"S-Sorry about him..."

"Hmph... You don't need to apologize. However, you're pretty polite considering how your father acts, aren't you? It was quite considerate of you to come out to visit."

"I think it's precisely because I'm his son that I strive to make sure I don't act the way he does."

"Hmph, I see."

The chairman let out a little laugh.

Is it just my imagination or did the atmosphere lighten up in here?

"Ah, that's right, this isn't much, but..."

I handed over the little souvenir I'd been holding onto but never had a good chance to give him.

"...You really are so polite I can't believe you're Hayato's son."

"No, it's nothing much."

Right after I finished talking to Sena this afternoon, I looked up "house visiting manners" on the internet, and found out that it's best to bring a gift so I quickly ran out to the store to buy one, but I'll keep that part to myself.

"What'd you bring?" asked Sena.

"It's a 'Salty and Spicy but Somehow Resembling a Profound Life Red Chili Oil' sampler pack."

"What the..."

Sena gave me a look that screamed 'what a weirdo'.

"Hey don't knock it until you've tried it. It's red chili, but it goes good on rice, pasta, fried stuff, and just about anything. Heck, even Kobato likes it and she hates spicy stuff."

"...Do you mind if I open it now?"

The chairman asked.

"G-go ahead."

He carefully opened the package, and took out one of the bottles from within.

Stella took the rest.

The chairman opened the bottle and scooped some of the "Salty and Spicy but Somehow Resembling a Profound Life Red Chili Oil " onto his rice and then ate it.

We all watched as he did, feeling oddly nervous.

"......It's delicious."

The chairman quietly said with a face that didn't look like he actually liked it in the least.

"Eh, really?"

Sena took the bottle from the chairman and put some on her tempura.

"Wow, it really is good."

"I'm glad you like it."

"...An-chan, I want some too."

Kobato murmured, prompting Sena to hand over the bottle to her.

Kobato dumped the red chili oil all over her tempura, rice, and iced tofu.

I took the bottle after her, and put a spoonful on my rice.

"Hmph... I forgot, but Hayato was rather good at finding these kinds of weird foods wasn't he..."

The chairman said in a nostalgic sounding voice.

After that, I told the chairman about the 10 years we spent after leaving this town and going around all of Japan in detail.

It seems that after up and moving all of a sudden 10 years ago, our dad barely contacted the chairman at all.

He only called once every few months or even years when he just happened to remember him, and there were a few times where the chairman thought of calling him, but by the time he did we had already moved again.

I guess the number of times we moved was more than the chairman was expecting, since after I told him he said,

"That man never changes... It must be hard for you two as well. That damn piece of shit even got his kids wrapped up in his obsession with excavating ancient ruins."

"He is not a piece of-!"

SLAM!

I got up out of my seat and yelled reflexively.

When I noticed that Kobato and Sena were staring at me with a startled look on their faces, I realized how embarrassing what I just did was.

However, I have to say at least this much.

"...Our father might be an idiot, but... he is not a piece of shit."

I quietly sat down on my chair again.

"...Hmph... I know that much."

The chairman said in an upset voice, with the ends of his mouth raised ever so slightly into a grin.

"Stay here for the night."

It didn't go perfectly, but thanks to the "Salty and Spicy but Somehow Resembling a Profound Life Red Chili Oil" we managed to end dinner peacefully, and as we were about to leave the chairman told us the above.

"No, we couldn't possibly impose on you anymore than we already have..."

"There's no need to act so polite about it."

...No, I'm not being polite, I just really don't want to have to spend the night at someone else's house.

It took a lot out of me to work up the courage just to come and have dinner. Having me stay over on top of that is just way more than I can handle.

"By the way, there are no buses that come out here after 8 on Saturdays."

Stella said in her typical calm voice after walking out from behind the chairman without making any noise whatsoever.

"Eh..."

I checked the time on the cell phone, only to see that it was just past eight o'clock.

It's true that there probably aren't many buses that come out this far into the residential district, but still... Damn... I should've figured this out ahead of time...!

"If you insist on returning home then I will prepare the car, but honestly speaking it would be quite a pain in the ass."

"A pain in the ass..."

Ms. Butler, you're way too blunt.

"What's the big deal, just stay here tonight Kodaka," Sena casually said.

"No, but, I don't even have my pajamas or anything..."

"You can use my night robe. That's what Hayato always did when he stayed over," the chairman added.

"But what about Kobato's..."

"I still have mine, the ones I used to wear when I was a kid she can use."

"Oh, but what about our rooms?"

"No problem. We have rooms for guests."

"Umm..."

I took a quick look at Kobato standing next to me.

"Fnyh..."

I dunno if she got tired after eating all that food, but she was rocking back and forth like a little boat out at sea.

"See, look. Kobato-chan can barely keep her eyes open."

Sena happily said.

"Oh yeah, she stayed up pretty late last night..."

...I gave in to their demands and let out a sigh.

I carried Kobato on my back as Sena guided us up to the guest rooms.

It was like a hotel room, with a table, full closet, and even a TV.

The bed wasn't pulled back yet, so I put Kobato down on the sofa.

"You know, Papa really seems to like you," Sena said.

"I haven't seen him that happy in a long time."

"...That was him being happy?"

"Super happy. Usually he never says a word unless he has to, especially at dinner."

"Oh...?"

"Of course, he was really only talking to you though..."

Sena pursed her lips looking a little upset, and as she did,

"Nnn... An-chan where are we...?"

Kobato opened her eyes and got up.

"Uehe!"

Sena made a huge grin.

"Sleepy Kobato-chan is so C~U~T~E~♥"

She slowly walked over to Kobato and said,

"Hey hey, Kobato-chan, let's take a bath together before bed."

"Nn... Okay... I will..."

She looked pretty tired still, and didn't reject Sena like she usually does.

"Good, then let's get to the bath."

Sena took Kobato's hand and left the room. I was worried, but it's true that she needs to take a bath so I let her go with a "Don't go too crazy, okay?"

After Sena and Kobato left I didn't have much to do, so I plopped myself down on the sofa when I heard a knock at the door.

The ones waiting on the other side were Stella and the chairman .

Stella had a pair of sheets and a futon in her arms, and the chairman had a wine bottle and two glasses with him.

"...Um, Chairman?"

I glanced over at Stella who quickly got to making the bed, and the chairman sat down on the sofa, putting the glasses down and uncorking the wine bottle.

"Hayato and Airi were both good drinkers. I bet you are too, right?"

"...Yeah, more or less."

Dad made me drink stuff all the time, so I'm aware that I'm pretty good with alcohol.

"I see, then have a seat."

The chairman poured some wine into each glass, and offered me one of them.

I couldn't refuse him so I took the glass and sat down across from him.

"...Is it really okay for a school's chairman to be offering a student alcohol?"

"The one who forced me to take time out of my precious studies and drink when I was still a student was your father."

...I don't know what you want me to do about that.

"Wine is the blood of Christ. There's nothing wrong with having a little."

"...Dad told you that, didn't he?"

"Yep."

He said, and downed his glass of wine in one gulp.

I followed his lead, except slower.

"Ah, this is good."

"Isn't it?"

The chairman said, looking slightly intoxicated.

Huh... is he drunk after only one glass?

The chairman poured himself another glass, and drank half of it in one gulp.

"Back when we were in school your father and I drank like this all the time..."

The chairman said with a distant look to his eyes.

To the chairman this might just be a few hours for him to reminisce about his younger days with his best friend, but as for me, I was having a man to man drink with a guy I just met today, so I just couldn't relax.

...Ah screw it, there's no going back now, I'll just have to rely on the wine!

I finished the rest of my glass in one big gulp.

"Not bad."

The chairman said, clearly in a good mood, as he poured me another.

"Drink as much as you like."

He poured more for himself too, and started drinking at a pretty fast pace.

"...Um, are you okay?"

"Huh? Why du yuu ashk?"

...It would seem he is not okay.

After that, the chairman started to tell me an old story about him and my dad, but he was so drunk I could barely understand a word he said.

Although, the fact that he still thinks of my father as his best friend was something I understood from him quite well.

He kept insulting Dad, calling him an idiot or an imbecile or something, but no matter how you look at it you can tell he likes him.

I'm sure that Dad feels the same way.

Even though 10 years had passed he had faith the chairman was still his friend, which is exactly why he felt safe leaving us behind in Japan while he went on his trip.

I wonder if I'll be able to make a friend like that too one day.

A friend who trusts me and whom I trust, no matter how many decades pass...

The events from 10 years ago crossed my mind.

Memories of my friend whom I left behind before being able to tell him anything.

I may have transferred schools a ton of times and met more people that I can even imagine, but to think I can't even remember his name or what he looked like... Maybe we were never really best friends to begin with...

I continued to slowly drink my wine while thinking about all that for about 15 minutes.

"Nggh..."

The wine bottle was empty and the chairman got so drunk that he was out cold on the table.

"Why would you try to drink so fast when you're bad with alcohol...?"

By the way, I wasn't drunk in the least.

Stella had finished making the bed and left some time ago.

I figured I might as well call her now, so I left the room.

I walked through a long hall full of guest rooms, and entered the main hall.

Then all of a sudden, I heard a door being flung open and heard a familiar scream along with the sound of someone's feet going plip plop getting closer.

"Wahhhhhhh! An-chaaaaaan!"

"Ufufu, Wait~ Kobato-cha~~n♥ Let's wash our backs now~~♥"

What entered into my eyes was

A giant word that took over my mind.

Meat.

An incredibly overwhelming Meat.

肉
太

Leg meat, arm meat, waist meat, neck meat, stomach meat, shoulder meat, cheek meat, thigh meat, hand meat, **breasts**, shoulder roast, rib roast, beef ribs made from the outer thigh, filet, skirt steak, beef, pork, chicken, sashimi, chicken wings, and **breasts**.

Blond hair, dripping wet, cheeks slightly red, a faint veil of steam, two gently swaying mounds. A flesh colored piece of meat powerful enough to drive Kodaka Hasegawa was

standing right in front of-

...Woah, my brain short-circuited there.

Maybe I'm a little drunk after all.

To simply explain what just happened, a completely naked Sena chasing a completely naked Kobato just ran up to me.

And all the while her huge boobs were bouncing up and down.

"Waittt~~ Kobato-cha-"

Kobato ran behind my back.

"K-Koda-!?"

Sena finally realized I was here, and her face turned so red it was like it got set on fire.

"Gyaahhhhh!? W-w-w-w-why are you here Kodaka!? Idiot! Moron! Perv! Idiot! Molester! Poop! Freak! God damn eroge protagonist!"

"The one who should be asking that is without a doubt me."

I turned away from Sena in a hurry.

"Yeah, you might be right! But, ummm, uhh, ummm, auauauauaaaahhhhhhh, you, ummm ummmm ummmmmmm-

UNIVERSSSSSSE!!"

Sena fled up the stairs, leaving nothing behind but the sound of her feet and an unintelligible roar of some kind.

I didn't move a muscle until I heard a door close from far away.

I turned around, and saw Stella who apparently showed up at some point.

"Uoh!?"

I was startled, but all Stella did was give me a faint smile and say "Iyan~ Kodaka you naughty boy~" in a monotone voice.

"...No, um, this was all an accident, and..."

"I am aware."

She said, and then handed over the towel she brought with her to Kobato who was still all wet.

"Now then, let us head back to the baths while the young mistress is hiding in her room."

"Okay..."

Kobato walked off with Stella while drying herself.

I didn't have anything else to do, so I went back to the room.

The chairman was no longer passed out face flat on the table, but was now passed out face flat on the bed, snoring away.

He must've woken up for a bit after I left and moved over to the bed.

Just when I was wondering what the heck I should do with him, Stella came in.

"This is quite a problem. The master never wakes up until morning no matter how hard you try."

She then continued, giving the following outrageous suggestion :

"Luckily the bed is big, so while it is unfortunate, please sleep here with the master tonight."

"Huh!?"

Yeah, I mean sure, the bed's a king size big enough for two people, but...

"C-can't I go use a different room?"

"You cannot."

"Why not!? I'm pretty sure I saw a ton of other guest rooms..."

"Those are all being used as storage currently."

"Storage!?"

"Yes. It's because the only ones who've ever stayed over here are essentially just you, Mr. Kodaka, and your father, Mr. Hayato."

She has no expression on her face at all, so I can't tell if she's telling the truth or lying...

"Ah, I-I see, then where's Kobato?"

"Regretfully, she will be sleeping with me in the servant's quarters. There are plenty of beds there and all."

"Then I'll go there too..."

"I do not mind, but the chef here, Hikawa, is a woman. Also I sleep completely naked."

After hearing her say "completely naked" I was reminded of Sena's naked body, and my face went beet red.

I hung my head in disappointment and told her, "...Fine, I'll sleep here."

I took a bath after Kobato was finished, and then went back to the room.

The chairman really was still sound asleep.

I pushed him over to the other side so I'd have space on the bed, and just as Stella said he didn't show even the faintest sign of waking up.

I didn't have anything else to do, so I just flopped on the bed and closed my eyes.

I was staying over at a girl's house... and sleeping with her father.

What the hell is this...?

I didn't think I'd be able to sleep at all given the situation, but the bed was remarkably comfortable, and I quickly fell asleep as well.

The next morning.

While waking up and getting a close-up shot of an old man's face is probably the worst way to wake up imaginable, I did feel really relaxed after sleeping in that bed.

After eating breakfast, Kobato and I were getting ready to leave the Kashiwazaki estate.

"Kodaka... Y-you really don't remember, right?"

"Remember what?"

Sena came down to the entrance and quietly asked to make sure that I didn't remember, and I played dumb like my life depended on it.

I told her that after drinking with the chairman I got so drunk that I didn't remember a thing about me being out in the halls or anything else.

Sena looked like she still had her doubts, but still told me "I guess that's fine then..." and went along with my story.

I doubt that she really believed me from the bottom of her heart, but I think Sena decided it'd be best to pretend it never happened too.

Sena, Stella, and the chairman saw us off as we left the mansion.

"...Kodaka."

The chairman, who still looked hungover, called out to me.

He gazed at me with a stern look in his eyes, and said,

"...Take good care of Sena for me."

He said it in a voice that was even more serious sounding that his normal one, and lightly bowed his head.

I smiled a bit and told him,

"Of course. Pegasus."

"Wh...! Y-you little..."

Kobato and I ran down the hill, away from the chairman whose face was a deep shade of red.

Back then, I still didn't know the meaning behind those parting words the chairman left with me.

The Sea

A few days after Obon was over.

The day of the Neighbors Club's training camp was upon us.

We were going to be spending 3 days and 2 nights at the Kashiwazaki family's villa and private beach.

The rest of the members had already arrived in front of the ticket gate in the middle of Tohya Station by the time Kobato and I arrived.

Yozora, Sena, Yukimura, Rika, and Maria.

As usual, Rika was in her uniform with a lab coat on top of it, Yukimura was in his maid outfit, and Maria was wearing her sister outfit that she wears at the academy.

Tohya station could almost be called the center of Renya city, and was fairly big with plenty of people going through it, which of course meant we got just as many weird looks.

Seriously, why do they always wear the same clothes...?

"Mu... Why is that pawn of God here...?"

Kobato gave Maria her usual treatment.

"Heh heh, because I'm the teacher here. I'm here to keep an eye on you rotten oranges so you don't cause any trouble. You should be thankful!"

Maria stuck her chest out full of pride, and Yozora casually handed her an empty can.

"Hey, Ms. Maria who I'm so thankful to. Throw this out."

"Eh...?" Maria just stared at her, and then said,

"W-why do I have to throw out your dumb juice can, stupid Yozora!"

"It's not juice, it's coffee."

"That doesn't matter!"

"Well this is a problem... I thought the only one capable of handling such an important task was the ever-reliable genius Ms. Maria..."

"R-Really? Heh, you're so hopeless! The reliable and clever Ms. Maria will just have to go throw that can out for you then!"

"Good, you really are reliable aren't you, Ms. Maria? The garbage bin is over that way. Hurry up and get moving, oh so clever Ms. Maria."

"I got it! Just leave it to me, since I'm so reliable!"

Maria took the can and went off to the garbage bin, not realizing Yozora was mocking her at all.

She's always so easy to trick like that.

After Maria was a good ways away, Yozora turned toward us and said,

"Now then, we're all here so let's go. I bought all your tickets already."

"Are you the incarnation of Satan himself!?"

"I'm just kidding."

I yelled at Yozora, and she replied in a tone that sounded happier than usual to me.

Anyway, we waited for Maria to return, and then went through the ticket gate and onto our train.

Our destination, Sena's villa, was in another prefecture, and according to the train schedule it'd take us about two and a half hours to get there from Tohya Station.

When we first got on, the train was pretty full, but after about 30 minutes when we got to a big station, a ton of people snuck off, and after that, the number of people kept continuing to decrease.

Yozora and Rika looked like zombies for the first 30 minutes, but after the people got off they started to look better.

We were currently broken up into two groups, each sitting in box seats.

One set of seats was Kobato, Yukimura, Maria and I, and in the other was the Yozora/Sena pair.

I picked out a seat at random, and was soon followed by Kobato , Maria, and Yukimura who sat in the same box with me, which was essentially the most natural arrangement for us anyway.

By the way if you're wondering about Rika, as soon as the people got off, she said "I'm gonna go 'enjoy' the part where the cars are connected." and left us.

Yozora was reading a book, Sena was playing a video game, and were basically just doing what they normally do to kill time in the clubroom.

Our side was playing old maid, and we were currently right in the middle of a fierce battle between Kobato and Maria to determine 3rd place.

"Ghh, another old maid...!"

Maria groaned after drawing a joker.

"Kukuku, imbecile... You're already under the control of the darkness... Escape is impossible... It's about time we sing your final requiem... I draw...!"

Kobato took a card from Maria's hand with the usual grin on her face.

"Uu~... I picked the old maid..."

"Kuhaha! Serves you right! That's what you get for turning your back on God you poop vampire! Ahaha, now I'm going to win..... Gyahh! Another old maid!?"

...This is at least our 10th game, and every time both Yukimura and I finished early while these two duked it out for 3rd place.

They both wear their emotions on their sleeves, and on top of that they're so obvious about everything that it makes them ridiculously bad at old maid.

On the other hand, Yukimura and that crazy poker face of his made him insanely strong to the point that I only managed to win the first game we played.

The only reason I even managed that single win was because Yukimura was trying not to offend me by letting me win and picked the old maid from me on purpose.

After I told him that letting me win is pointless and that he should play for real, he did so, completely annihilating us every single time.

Every match ended up with Yukimura in first, me in second, and Maria and Kobato duking it out for third and fourth, so I can't say it was really all that fun.

However apparently the only game we all knew was old maid, so we either did that or nothing.

Oh well. Even though I'm bored it's nice to see Maria and Kobato enjoying themselves, so we continued playing old maid.

Thus, we spent a good two and a half hours like that.

The train finally arrived at our destination.

"That went by in the blink of an eye~ Rika could spend an entire day there."

Rika who apparently spent the entire train ride over where the train cars connected said, as she joined up with us.

"What's so fun about that anyway?"

"Because it's two dirty lumps of metal bound to each other going 'clang clang' and 'bang bang' as the train moves along! It's not even possible to get sexier than that! Rika was starting to get horny just by standing there! Senpai, just where can Rika let this feeling, bubbling up inside her, out at!?"

"Ask someone who cares."

"I wanted you to tell me 'You can let it out on me!' right there."

"Go let it out on that telephone pole over there."

"Ahhh, but telephone poles are kinda iffy."

"You've tried it before!?"

She's as impossible to understand as ever.

The train stopped and we opened the door to the outside.

Outside the sun was shining brightly, causing us to cover our eyes.

It was cooler here than Tohya city, but even so it was still hot out.

"...So, Meat. Where's this villa of yours?"

Yozora asked after walking out of the train station, that was completely dead, while airing her shirt out to cool off.

Sena stuck out her finger and answered,

"Over there. It'll take about an hour by foot."

"An hour...?"

We all made faces like the world was about to end.

There were no houses around us, and you could actually see pretty far.

And at the far end of a long asphalt road full of cracks, that looked like it hadn't been paved in some time, lay a large forest full of big trees.

"Don't tell me it's in that forest..."

"Yeah, it is, what about it? It'll be fine, there's only one road so nobody will get lost."

Sena casually told me as a cold sweat ran down my face.

"There don't appear to be any taxis or buses around here... not a single one..."

Rika looked around, then hung her head in disappointment.

It was already weird enough that the train made a stop out here, so, of course, there wouldn't be any buses.

Sena then faced away from the forest and pointed while saying,

"By the way, the closest town is about 5 kilometers that way I think. Papa told me all the stores close at eight o'clock, and that we should pay attention to what time we go out to buy stuff."

"Uuu... What a terrible place. Rika is too used to civilization for this. But if Kodaka-senpai lets me take a bath with him later I think I can manage."

"Please don't strain yourself and go home then."

"Kodaka-senpai... you're so nice..."

"I'm not really saying it to be nice."

I quipped at Rika whose cheeks were tinged with a faint red.

"Heh heh, a tsundere huh? I get it. I-it's not like Kodaka-senpai worried about Rika, okay!?"

"From whose point of view would that tsundere line be anyway ?"

"Who knows, but don't you think having a tsundere omniscient narrator has a fresh feeling to it?"

"Yeah, I doubt anyone's done it before, but..."

"From whose point of view would that tsundere line be anyway?"

It's not like Kodaka made a remark like that or anything, okay !?

"Who knows, but don't you think having a tsundere omniscient narrator has a fresh feeling to it?"

You'd be making a big mistake if you thought Rika said something like that, okay!?

"Yeah, I doubt anyone's done it before, but..."

Is what Kodaka said, b-but it's not like Kodaka really thought Rika's idea was fresh or anything, okay!?

...I tried imagining it a little, but it made absolutely no sense whatsoever.

Who are you even acting tsundere towards? The readers?

"Just because it's new or fresh doesn't mean it's a good idea does it..."

But it's not like I really thought that from the bottom of my heart, okay?

"Hmph... in manga and stuff, when the characters go to a crazy training camp like this out in the middle of nowhere, the club advisor usually takes everyone there in a car, but..."

Yozora wiped her sweat, looking annoyed with the whole situation, then stared at Maria.

"I-I can't help it! No matter how smart I am, there's no way I could get a license!"

"I know. I never expected anything from you in the first place. Only an idiot would expect a little girl like you to be of any use out at a training camp like this."

"T-that's not true! I might be a little girl, but I'm useful!"

Maria said, taking Yozora's bait.

"I see. Then you'll do exactly what I tell you."

"Okay!"

"No matter what I say you have to do it."

"Yeah! I'll do anything!"

"You swear to God?"

"I swear to God!"

Hook, line, and sinker...

"There you go, getting her to listen to you again... What are you even gonna make a little girl like her do?"

"I haven't decided. I'm merely the type of person who takes raising her pets very seriously."

Yozora casually answered my question.

"Come on, quit talking and let's get going already."

Sena said, hurrying along.

"Oh well... let's go I guess."

I said while picking up the backpack I'd put down on the ground.

Inside it was my change of clothes, swimsuit, and other necessities along with some ingredients to make us food with.

We divvied things up evenly so that we'd each bring some ingredients, but I had the most with me.

Seven people's worth of food is pretty heavy, and the backpack weighed down on me like a ton of bricks.

I have to carry this for an hour, huh... this is gonna suck...

We spent roughly an hour walking under the blazing sun.

You could smell the sea a little bit by the time we reached the forest.

We quickly walked our way through it, and, at last, reached the villa.

Right outside the forest was an elevated area and a sandy beach below it.

The Kashiwazaki family's villa was sitting atop the elevated area.

It looked like a normal, if a bit small, house with a garage next to it.

"T-the sea! The sea! The sea!"

Kobato yelled in a voice full of energy.

She didn't pay any attention to the villa, simply staring out at the sea with shining eyes.

The sun's light hitting the sea made it sparkle with a beautiful aquamarine color.

I've lived near the sea plenty of times before, but because it's been a while since the last time I did, seeing the sea so close to me right now felt a little nostalgic.

It's a private beach too, so obviously there was nobody on the beach or in the water.

"Is it really okay for us to use this place all for ourselves...?"

I unintentionally let out a sigh of admiration.

"I-I-I-I-I wanna swim! An-chan let's go swim!"

Kobato was so excited she looked like she was about to run off to the beach and leave her luggage behind.

"Heh, getting all excited over a little beach. You're supposed to be older than me, but you're just a little kid!" said Maria.

She seemed to be trying to act more mature, but she could barely hold back a grin and was obviously shaking with excitement too.

She sort of looked like she was doing a weird dance.

"We can go swim after we put our luggage away."

I told the two girls overflowing with excitement as we all went into the villa.

Although it might not get used all that often, it looked like it was well-kept and the inside of it looked really nice.

And just like Sena said, it seemed to have electricity.

The place had everything from a TV to air conditioning, and plenty of appliances to use. If you ignore the fact that getting here is a pain, this looks like a pretty nice place to live.

Anyway, I took the perishables we brought with us and put them in the fridge, and then had Sena show us where we'd be sleeping.

We decided how to split up the room beforehand. It'd be me and Yukimura, Yozora and Sena, and then a group of 3 consisting of Rika, Kobato, and Maria.

It was obvious that me and Yukimura would be paired together as the only guys, but the girls took forever to decide and ended up using a lottery.

...I get the feeling that pairing Yozora with Sena and Kobato with Maria is the worst way it could've come out, but that's what they decided so whatever.

"It's your job to stop Maria and Kobato if they start fighting."

I warned Rika, and then she said,

"Please relax, Senpai. Rika can handle a pair of naughty kids like them in no time at all."

"Oh? That's surprising."

"Yep, my stun gun's ready to go whenever."

"How is that supposed to make me relax!?"

We carried our luggage to each of our rooms, changed into our swimsuits, and gathered downstairs in the living room.

"An-chan you're so slow!"

Kobato said with her cheeks puffed out.

I was the last one to finish changing, and everyone else was already there by the time I came down.

I would've changed faster, but it took me a while since I had to wait outside until Yukimura was done changing.

Sena and Kobato were in bikinis, and Yukimura was in a bikini too, but with a paleo wrapped around just like before.

Rika was in the same swimsuit she showed me before with her lab coat over it, and Yozora was wearing a striped full body swimsuit that looked like a prisoner's clothes (minus the horse mask this time).

...Oh well, I guess it won't matter since this is a private beach.

"Onii-chan! Let's go, let's go!"

Maria came running at me and grabbed my hand.

Maria was wearing a white school swimsuit with a name tag that read "maria" sewn onto it.

Yep, a more normal swimsuit like this fits a little kid way better than a bikini.

"Kh... You would do well to remove your hands from him, you pawn of God..."

Kobato said to Maria.

"To think you'd attempt to try and seduce my fellow clansman with such an outfit... such impudence...!"

"Seduce?" Sena asked, tilting her head.

"Muu... Kh...!"

I noticed Kobato's gaze was directed at a single part of Maria's body..... that is to say, she was staring at her chest.

"Something wrong with her name tag?"

"N-no, there's nothing really wrong with it..."

Kobato turned her face away trying to avoid the subject.

"Ah, Kobato-chan are you worried you have even less of a chest than Maria?"

"N-no!"

Sena's question made Kobato's face go beet red.

"Chest...?"

Now that she mentions it, I do see two little bulges on her that you normally can't see since she wears those baggy nun clothes.

They were just barely big enough to make them look on the large side for her age, but even so, they were obviously bigger than Kobato's nearly non-existent chest.

"Uuu..."

"Hehe!"

Maria let out a stifled giggle after seeing Kobato in anguish comparing the size of their breasts.

"Ahahaha! You're older than me, but your boobs are smaller! Ahaha, hey did you know? Guys like girls with big boobs! Hey, hey, Onii-chan! Onii-chan, do you like big boobs!?"

How can she ask me that with that innocent look on her face!?

"A-an-chan doesn't like big ones at all, moron!"

"Eh!? He doesn't!?"

"...You don't?" "You don't like them?"

For some reason Sena and Rika joined Maria in seriously asking me about it.

"I-I can't say... that I don't... like them."

I didn't know what to say, so I blurted out a serious answer.

I mean come on, I *am* a guy after all!

It's because I'm a guy!

"Ahahaha! See, look? Onii-chan does like big boobs! I know what that's called, it's uhh... ah, 'Big Tits Fetish'! Onii-chan has a big tits fetish! Ahahahaha!"

"Uuuu, what's so funny you damn retard..."

Kobato ground her teeth with tears in her eyes.

"So you have a big tits fetish, Aniki...?"

Yukimura asked in a voice that sounded sad for some reason.

"....."

Even Yozora was glaring at me like she was pissed off.

"Ahh, come on! Who the heck even cares!? Let's just go to the beach already, come on!"

I quickly changed the subject before things got any worse.

After grabbing a swimming tube, a towel, a body board, a vinyl sheet, a beach umbrella, and a few other things, we left the villa and headed for the beach.

By the way, the body board, beach umbrella and beach chair were all taken from the villa.

There was a small truck in the garage along with an electric bike that I saw too, so I guess going to town won't be so bad after all.

"Oh hey, so, aren't we going to do you know what?"

Rika asked as we were walking down to the beach.

"What do you mean?"

"That exhibitionist-type thing where we all make a pose and yell "The seaaaaa!" before running off towards it."

"Don't call it an exhibitionist-type thing," I remarked.

"Now that you mention it, the whole cast of 'Mofu? MOFU!' did that when they went to the beach. Yelling 'The seaaaaa!' I mean..."

Sena said in a voice that made it sound like she was hoping we'd do it.

"...That, huh... I've seen people do that in manga too, but... what's the point? Is it some ritual that normals do?"

Yozora looked baffled by the whole idea.

"Maybe it's something we'll understand once we become normals too," said Rika.

"Well, I don't really get it, but should we do it? As practice?" Sena said.

"...Hmm, it would suck if we didn't know how to yell and do the pose right when we come to a beach party with our friends in the future." and Yozora agreed.

"...But, umm... I think that's more of a thing you just do in the moment. I doubt you can really practice for it..."

As was only natural by now, my doubts were completely ignored as Yozora said,

"Okay, let's give it a shot. Line up in a row."

So we all put down our luggage, made a line right behind the embankment, and faced the sea.

"So we look at the sea and yell 'The seaaaaa!'? I don't get it at all! "

Maria tilted her head in confusion.

"Okay, we'll yell at once when I give the signal. You can all pose however."

Everyone felt a little anxious, but still nodded anyway. Then Yozora said,

"Okay. Here we go.... One, two, three!"

"T-the sea!"

"....."

"The seaaa..."

"It's the sea."

"--The s- agk, gack, Rika's bad with salty air..."

"Kukuku..."

"The seaaaaaaaaa!!!"

The only one who was able to yell right was Maria (by the way she did a banzai pose), while the rest of us (me included) failed miserably.

I felt incredibly embarrassed, so all I did was quietly say it without taking a pose.

Yozora's cheeks were a little red too, and she didn't say anything (though it did look like she was about to). Standing there with her arms posed is more or less Yozora's default pose I guess.

Sena went to yell normally, but once she noticed the only other one doing it was Maria, her face went a deep red and she cut herself off, frozen in a weird crane pose.

All Yukimura said was "It's the sea." in his usual quiet monotone voice.

Rika took a big breath before she went to yell, but choked on the salty air.

Kobato did her usual chuckle while posing as if she was gathering the power of darkness or something.

"T-that was kinda..."

"Y-yeah."

"...Yeah."

Yozora, Sena, and I all looked at each other.

It looks like facing the sea and yelling is pretty hard unless you're a real normal.

Even if we can make any pose we want, just doing it all of a sudden is practically impossible.

"...This is something we should practice on our own, yeah. I'd bet a million yen that normals spend hours at home practicing making cool poses."

Yozora said trying to avoid doing this again, and I nodded in agreement.

"Let's save practicing yelling 'The seaaaaa!' for when we're at a more advanced level... Anyway, let's go."

A more advanced level? What?

We all grabbed our luggage and started walking again with our newly gained awkward mood.

"The sea! The sea! The seaaa! Kuhahaha! The blue sky, white waves, and pure red sun are calling to me! Yayyy!"

The second she got to the beach, Leysis Vi Felicity Sumeragi (a vampire) made a mad dash for the sea.

"Hey, wait Kobato."

I grabbed Kobato's hand and stopped her.

"Fueh? What is it An-chan?"

"You can play after you put on your sunscreen."

I took out the sunscreen from my pouch.

We didn't need it at Saint Chronica Academy's pool, or Ryuuguu Land, or any other indoor pool, but for someone like Kobato who tans easily on a hot day with the sun out like this, sunscreen is definitely needed.

She was already wearing that stupidly revealing swimsuit as is.

"Mu... How very excellent of you to warn me, my servant... Getting into the bath with a sunburn hurts after all, kukuku... That fiery red star is such an annoyance..."

I guess she must've remembered the time we went to an outdoor pool and got a terrible sunburn because she didn't put any sunscreen on.

After I spread out the vinyl sheet and set up the umbrella, Kobato untied the string on her bikini and lied down on the sheet.

"S'cold!?"

Kobato let out a yell when I touched her back with the sunscreen.

"Deal with it."

I told her, while rubbing sunscreen all over her back, arms, neck , butt, and legs.

"Wa... That looks so naughty Senpai... gulp..."

Rika spat out some nonsense while blushing.

"You should put some on too ya know."

I warned her while still putting on the sunscreen.

"...I didn't bring any sunscreen with me, but... I'll probably be okay."

Yozora said in her full body swimsuit.

"It'd be a good idea to put some on your face Yozora-senpai. You should never underestimate ultra-violet rays. Here, Rika will let you use her special sunscreen."

"...What'd you put in it?"

Yozora said with a look of doubt on her face.

"Aha, it's fine~ It'll just make you feel a little better than normal sunscreen does, and it's easy on your skin. Just a little bit of it will make you feel nice and refreshed."

"...Kodaka. Lend me yours when you're done with it."

Rika made a disappointed looking face upon hearing Yozora say that.

"I know what ultra-violet rays are! They're scary! Onii-chan! Rub some of the ultra-violet ray barrier on me too!"

Maria came over to me.

"Sure. You look like you tan easily too, so we better make sure you've got some."

"Aniki, would you be so kind as to do me as well?"

Yukimura timidly asked.

"...S-sure, that's fine. I'll do you after Maria."

I answered him while feeling a strange sense of nervousness, and then Yukimura made a gentle smile and said,

"Sorry to trouble you, Aniki. I will handle your back in return."

"Ah, okay, thanks."

Right as he said that, Rika let out the weirdest voice.

"KonieofionVz; iNOwgJiahoglpWmBaUeJghiwgHiOersJIgsabeMansmyghajgopuej!!"

I was surprised by her yelling all of a sudden in a voice I'm not quite sure how she even managed to make, and when I looked over at her she was breathing wildly with a creepy smile on her face.

"Y-Y-Y-Y-Y-Yukimura taking Kodaka-senpai from behind... Kodaka-senpai feels a bit nervous, but his heart is pounding in anticipation. He then takes in Yukimura's splendid rod... it's so... big... HaaHaa... HaaHaa...

"EXACLIBURRRRRRRR!!"

Rika screamed, her eyes rolled into the back of her head, and then she fell face down onto the beach.

...I seriously have no idea what goes on inside that head of hers...

Just then, I made eye contact with Sena by chance.

Her cheeks were red for some reason as she looked over at Kobato and I, and they got even more red when our eyes met which prompted her to turn her back to us and say,

"Y-Yozora!"

"...What, Meat?"

Yozora half-glared at Sena who called out to her in a weird voice.

"R-rub some sunscreen on me!"

"What'd you just say? Why the hell should I have to handle a slab of meat like you?"

"W-what's wrong with that!? You're not doing anything anyway !"

Sena shoved the sunscreen into Yozora's hand, and spread out a vinyl sheet a little ways away from us.

"Hmph... fine. I'll rub it on you."

Yozora got around behind Sena as she opened the cap on the sunscreen.

"Good, See? You should always just listen to what I say."

Sena said, seemingly satisfied, before laying down on the sheet and undoing the top string on her bikini.

Yozora then squeezed out some sunscreen into her hand.

...But for some reason she took off her sandals and put it on the bottom of her own feet.

Once she finished putting the sunscreen all over her feet, Yozora lightly stepped onto Sena's back.

"That's cold!"

"Deal with it."

Yozora was spreading the sunscreen on Sena's back using her feet.

There was a tiny little evil smirk on her face.

"Nn... ah, that hurts...! Can't you be more gentle? Don't you think you're putting too much strength into it?"

"It's hard to get it just right, since I'm not used to doing this and all. It'd help if you sat still for me."

Yozora replied in a very sincere tone of voice to Sena's complaints. While stepping on her of course.

"Hmm... Well I guess you can't help it if you're not used to it. I mean, I seriously doubt you've ever had someone ask you to put sunscreen on them other than me."

Sena said, still sounding satisfied, not yet realizing she was being stepped on.

It's weird, watching this and wondering when she'll notice is kind of exciting...

"Anyway, I guess it's better to have it overdone than not, so I'll just deal with your shitty way of rubbing it onto me. At least keep it even though."

"Of course, leave it to me."

"Heh heh, you're pretty obedient today. Did you finally realize how great I am?"

"Something like that."

"Hehe, you'd be much cuter if you were always like this."

"You think so? Then I'll try to do so from now on. I'm a very open-minded person after all."

"Yeah yeah, that's great, but just focus on rubbing that sunscreen onto me for now."

Meat happily laughed, and then said,

"...Hey, is it just me or do you have pretty big hands? It feels like the part of you touching my skin is kinda big."

"It's probably just your imagination."

"Think so? Maybe it's harder to feel on my back-"

Sena said while turning her head sideways to look behind her.

"Gyaaahhhhh!? W-w-w-w-what the hell are you doing!?"

Sena screamed upon finally realizing that Yozora was using the soles of her feet to rub the sunscreen onto her back.

"Hey now, hold still Meat."

Yozora stepped down on Sena's back just above the center, stopping her from getting up.

"...!? W-what!? I-I can't move...!? Why!?"

"It's because I'm on top of your center of gravity. You'll never be able to stand up no matter how hard you try."

"Ghh...!"

"Hmph... It was foolish of you to show your back to me, damn Meat... Just sit there and wait until I'm done putting your sunscreen on."

"Khh, I let my guard down! Even though I know Yozora would never do something nice for m- fgaghh...!"

Sena's face was flushed red as she tried to stand up, but Yozora just ground her feet into Sena's upper back.

"Uu~ Do it the right way, with your hands, stupid!"

"What's the difference between doing it with my hands and doing it with my feet?"

"There's a huge difference! I'm the only one who's allowed to step on other people's backs!"

Sena yelled, with tears in her eyes.

"Come to think of it, I hear you go around school stepping on guys calling it 'a reward'. How is it? Do you like my 'reward'?"

"A-as if I'd ever like this, stupid Yozora! That's only true for me because I'm a goddess! There's no way anybody would ever enjoy getting stepped on by nasty feet like yours!"

"Is that so? Are you sure you don't enjoy getting stepped on? Kukuku... your body is quite honest..."

"Eh...? T-that's not... true..."

Sena's face was deep red as she denied it, but her voice did sound a little weak.

The smile of a true master sadist rose onto Yozora's face.

"Hmph, it would seem I was right on the money! Being stepped on like those men you do the same to, with your body being held to the ground unable to get up, having your pride and dignity stolen away as you let yourself take such a humiliating position and have someone else trample all over you... To think you'd derive some kind of sick pleasure out of this, you really are a total pervert! You god damn piggy bitch meat slave!"

"U... Uu... that's not true... it doesn't feel good at... all..."

Even more tears gathered up in Sena's eyes after taking Yozora's abuse.

"Kukuku... Just admit it, Meat. Even though you usually act like a queen and look down on normal people, you're really nothing more than a piggy bitch who enjoys having others abuse her. You've been a perverted lump of Meat since birth. You're a walking ball of obscenity... Look at all this thick, white fluid on you, piggy bitch... You should just shut up and let someone grill and then eat you...! Come on, beg me like the disgusting pig you are...! I want you to yell 'Please step on this bitch's vulgar breasts until they're crushed into oblivion'! Beg me to cover your filthy little body with my white fluid like the horny dog you are! Beg me, your god, to trample you as much as I see fit!!"

"G... Ghh... Don't get carried... awayyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!!!!!!!!"

Sena yelled, and put all her strength into her arms.

Sena's hands sunk into the sand, and shifted her center of gravity.

"What!?"

Yozora's face turned to one of shock.

Sena took this opportunity to twist her entire body and stand up.

"Kh!"

Yozora lost her balance and was thrown off of Sena's back, landing on her butt in the sand.

Sena looked at Yozora with a mix of anger and tears on her face, along with a twisted smile, and said,

"Haa... Haa... I-I'm not a pervert!! I'm a queen and a goddess!! Got it!?"

She declared full of force, as she puffed out her chest.

"...Hmph, you really are such an impertinent piece of meat..."

There was a faint smile on Yozora's face as she said that.

Sena who had protected her pride, and Yozora who acknowledged her strength... Such a touching scene like that was nowhere to be found, sadly.

.....Oh yeah, by the way,

When Sena lay down so Yozora could put the sunscreen on her, she undid the top of her bikini.

I shouldn't have to explain what she looked like when she stood up all of a sudden.

I made it look like I was never watching her in the first place, and just kept quietly putting sunscreen on Kobato.

"Ohh! Sena your boobs are really big!"

"Eh? Huh?"

Upon hearing Maria's admiration, Sena finally realized the state she was in.

.....

.....

...Sena's scream echoed throughout the beach.

"Yozora you god damn demon slime!!! I'm the real queen here, don't you forget ittt!!!!"

Sena ran away with tears in her eyes carrying the top half of her swimsuit.

Is there any place these two don't act like this...?

"...You're the slime, damn Meat."

Yozora spat out, as she watched Sena run away, breasts bouncing and all.

We went back to the villa around the time the sky started to turn a bright orange.

Neither Yozora, Rika, Yukimura, nor Maria were able to cook, so dinner was up to me alone.

When I asked Yozora and Rika what they did for Home Ec. class, Rika said,

"Whenever Rika cooks it always ends up exploding or tasting like medicine. When I was in middle school they banned me from going into the Home Ec. classroom. I know that putting weird stuff into the food is bad, but I always end up doing it anyway. Hey, Kodaka-senpai you know how I feel, right? There's just times where you get really horny and want to stick things into other things."

Like hell I understand that. On the other hand,

"...I've always stood in the corner by myself somewhere when we cook. The rest of my group just cooks like I'm not even there. When they're done, I quietly eat my portion of the food they made for me out of pity at the end of the table. I finish my food first, and then wash the tableware I used. That's how cooking class has always been for me... The groups at all the other tables happily eat the meal they made together, but my group always ends up being completely silent..."

Yozora said with a distant look in her eyes, making me feel awful for asking her about it.

By the way, it seems Kobato and Yukimura also always let the other people do everything for them.

Well anyway, for dinner I made curry, which is a little boring, but easy to make a ton of.

Normally I mix in some spices and stuff to make my own original curry, but since I already had a ton of luggage to carry today I just went with some simple curry roux mix I bought at the store.

I mixed in four of the different kinds they were selling though, so I managed to make it turn out pretty decent.

Even after we finished eating dinner Sena still hadn't come back , so I got worried and went out to look for her, and found her sitting by the front door holding her knees, still in her swimsuit.

"Why're you way over here?" I asked.

Sena's cheeks went red and she turned her back to me before saying in a tiny voice,

"...D-did you... umm... s-see it?"

"Eh, see what?"

I hid my surprise and played dumb with all I had.

"Before I went running off, umm..."

"I was still putting sunscreen on Kobato when you did, so I don't really know what happened, but it was probably just Yozora messing with you again, right?"

...I get the feeling I might've blown my cover there.

Unlike Yozora, I'm not very good at acting.

Even so, Sena said,

"A... Ah, yeah, that's right! That idiot is the worst!"

And seemingly believed my story with her cheeks still dyed a little red (just like the time I saw her naked at her house).

Ghost Stories

After we all ate and took a bath, Kobato and Maria both fell fast asleep after playing so much down at the beach.

Yozora, Sena, Rika, Yukimura and I were gathered in the living room.

Yozora was reading a book, Sena was playing her PS she brought all the way out here, Rika was doing something on her computer, and Yukimura was spacing out.

Basically, we were all doing what we normally do in the clubroom without any change at all.

I played "Mon Hunt" for a while, but quickly got sleepy and went to bed.

I was pretty tired, and I slept like a log until morning.

For breakfast the next morning, we had more of that huge batch of curry I made.

Personally I think that curry you let sit overnight in the fridge is the best.

After we ate, I went down to the beach with Kobato and Maria.

Sena and Yukimura decided to come too, but Yozora and Rika stayed behind at the villa.

Sena was finally able to fulfill her dream of swimming with Kobato, but couldn't keep up with her in the least. Kobato can swim as good as any fish, and so Sena ended up collapsing on the sand.

"... Haa... Haa... K-Kobato-chan, you swim really fa-... ugueh..."

"She's an even better swimmer than I am. You just learned how to swim a little while ago, you don't have a chance of keeping up with her."

I said with a wry smile.

After lunch (I made yakisoba) Kobato, Maria, and Sena all fell asleep after using up all their energy down at the beach.

I took my chance to go to buy stuff in town while the two kids were asleep. It took me about 40 minutes round trip using the electric bike in the garage.

It was an easygoing small port town, and it was nice to be able to buy so much fresh fish at such a low price.

I put the fish I bought to good use later that night, and made us paella for dinner.

Since I had to make enough for seven people and all, I made things a little more extravagant than usual too.

Making a big meal like this once in a while is actually pretty fun .

There were a few parts that got a little too burnt, but everyone said they liked it despite that.

That's how things went for the evening, and then night came.

Everyone was gathered in the living room, but we were all just killing time the way we usually do.

"...We're going home tomorrow, but we still haven't done anything very training-camp-like, have we?"

I said to nobody in particular.

"What do you mean by training-camp-like?" Sena raised her head from her PSP and asked.

"I dunno, but we're all here so I was just thinking it'd be fun to do something together."

"We all went to the sea and did that yelling out 'The seaaaaa!' didn't we?" said Yozora.

"...That doesn't really count."

Then, Rika jumped in to comment.

"Everyone just doing their own thing isn't anything unusual, but it is true that we rarely all gather up like this. It does kinda feel like a waste to not do anything while we have the chance."

"Right?"

"Yes, and, of course, a group of young men and women together at night means we should have an org- fgah!?"

Smack!

Yozora hit Rika over the head with her fly swatter before she could finish her sentence.

...Did she really bring that all the way out here?

"We don't need any obscene remarks from you, pervert."

"Oh, what's this? I think immediately deciding that what I was about to say was obscene just based on hearing 'org' means you're quite the pervert yourself Yozora-senpai. I could've been about to say 'organized competition' or been about to say we should have an 'organized discussion' about something."

"T-that's..."

Yozora's face went deep red after having Rika point that out.

"Of course, it's true that I was about to say that we should have an orgy party."

This time I took the chance to silently whack Rika on the head.

"It doesn't hurt! Please hit me harder Senpai!"

"Ehh!?"

That unexpected reaction of hers creeped me out.

"Hey hey~ what kind of party is an orgy party!? I want to try having one!"

Maria asked, eyes sparkling.

After she did, a suspicious gleam rose in Rika's eyes as she went and did something on her laptop. Then, while she was showing the screen to Maria, Rika whispered in her ears.

"An orgy party is where you murmur murmur whisper whisper murmur murmur..."

"Uwahhhhh!! Orgy parties are scaryyyyyy~~!"

Maria clung to me and started shaking in fear.

"What're you teaching her now..."

I rubbed my temple out of annoyance.

"Well, I suppose I don't want you to think I'm a total pervert freak who can only spit out dirty jokes, so as a serious reply to you Senpai, why don't we try something fitting a summer night like ghost stories or a test of courage? Rika actually has quite a few scary stories to tell."

Rika casually said.

"You're way too late if you don't want me to think that you're a pervert freak who can only spit out dirty jokes, but ghost stories or a test of courage, huh... That's not a bad idea. See, you can do it if you try. Why don't you act like this more often!?"

"...Getting yelled at even though I gave you a good idea seems a bit unfair."

Rika started sulking a bit and pursed her lips.

"Still, I didn't see this coming. Never thought a science girl like you would be into that stuff."

"Senpai, all girls love supernatural stuff like this. Rika is still a girl before she's a scientist. Even if I'm a perverted freak girl."

"Don't admit it..."

Talking with her always wears me out.

"Ghost stories and a test of courage, huh... I couldn't care less about ghost stories, but I wanna try doing a test of courage since they did one in 'TokiMemo'," said Sena.

"Hmph, well it's not like we have anything else to do..."

Yozora agreed and then said,

"But we don't have anything ready for a test of courage, so how about we tell some scary stories first and then go out into the forest ?"

"Sure, why not? I think it's already pretty scary just walking through there in the dark as is."

I agreed with Yozora's idea.

"I shall do whatever Aniki wishes."

Yukimura meekly said.

"Kukuku... the darkness of the night is my companion... I will not feel a single drop of fear..."

"I-I'm not scared of monsters either! If a monster does come out, I'll beat him with my holy power!"

Maria energetically announced in response to Kobato.

We set a few candles on a table in the living room, and then all gathered around it with the lights off.

We turned off the A.C. and opened the windows instead, but it was still really hot.

The flame of the candles flickered to the point it looked like they'd go out any minute, and brought a faint light to everyone's face.

"Wow... this has a good scary feel to it."

I said in admiration.

"Kodaka's and Yozora's faces look even scarier than usual like this..."

"With it this dark you'd never know who it was that groped you I bet."

"This is like a birthday party!"

Sena, Rika, and Maria all said, destroying the atmosphere.

"...Let's get started. Who's first?"

Yozora asked, and Rika volunteered.

"Rika will go first, since she thought of it. Hehe, I'm setting the bar pretty high with this one."

"Hmph, then show us what you've got."

"Very well!!"

Everyone focused on Rika as she began talking.

"This is something that really happened to Rika... I can clearly remember the fear I felt even now... I can't forget it even if I wanted to... Let's see, it happened... one summer day when I was a freshman in middle school..."

She lowered the tone of her voice, giving it an eerie feel.

This might be a seriously scary story...

I heard someone go 'gulp' as they swallowed their spit.

"Back then Rika wasn't much of a hikikomori, and was seeking out a Freedom Gamudan x Destiny Gamudan as she stepped foot into a boy's love specialty shop named 'Tora no Anal'..."

...Huh?

"The store sold many kinds of BL doujinshi, but the one I was after was already few in number, and there was only one left when I arrived... It would not be a mistake to call me finding that last copy destiny... Rika returned home as she trembled with joy, and immediately began reading the doujinshi... But a terrible thing occurred... The cover was a picture of Destiny Gamudan being penetrated from behind by Freedom Gamudan's beam saber that looked like a Free x Des doujin no matter how you looked at it, but it was actually a Des x Free doujin... Eeeek...!!"

.....

.....

.....?

"...What about the rest?"

We all waited, expecting her to continue, but all Rika did was make a confused face and said,

"Eh? That was the end."

"That's the end!?"

We all fell down in shock.

"That was a terrifying experience... I can handle a reverse pairing now, but to Rika who was still a pure maiden back in those days, Freedom had to be the top and Destiny the bottom. A Destiny x Freedom doujin was out of the question. You might say it was Rika's fault for not researching it enough beforehand, but I simply got too excited the second I saw that cover on the net..."

Who cares...

"...So yeah, next~."

Yozora said, brushing Rika aside.

"Very well, I shall take my turn next."

Yukimura was the one who volunteered this time.

"Oh, this is a surprise."

Yukimura began to tell his story.

"...Now then, I shall tell you the tale of... 'The Terrifying Shuumai'."

"""That's not a ghost story!"""

Yozora, Sena and I all yelled in unison.

Yukimura tilted his head in confusion.

"But this is a truly terrifying story. I myself never expected the shuumai to be stuck to the lid of the box..."

"You even gave away the punch line!"

He's hopeless.

"...Don't you have any other stories?" Yozora asked.

"In that case, while they do not compare to 'The Terrifying Shuumai', I do have several other stories I am familiar with."

...So he said, and went on to tell us "The Haunted Canal", "The Demon Cat of Nabeshima", "The Mansion of Plates", and "Hoichi the Earless" instead.

I'd heard the stories themselves plenty of times before, but the fact that they've lasted this long as horror stories is really more of a testament to their quality, and they were plenty scary when combined with Yukimura's quiet monotone voice.

"O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-Onii-chan..."

"Hyauuu... An-chaaan..."

Kobato and Maria were both shaking and half in tears as they clung to my arms.

"I-i-it's fine, there's nothing to be scared of. Yeah, nothing at all...!"

I said, while myself also shaking a little.

"Geez... Why didn't you react like that to my story... Rika thinks her story was just as scary as his."

Rika said, pouting about the difference in our reactions.

"H-hey, Yozora, did that actually scare you? M-maybe I should be nice and let you h-hold my hand."

Sena said with the tips of her mouth quavering.

"Hmph, it's funny how obviously scared you are when you shake like that, Meat."

Yozora said, showing no particular signs of being afraid.

"Kh..."

Sena let out a frustrated grumble.

"I-in that case, I'll go next and have you so scared you'll pee yourself!"

Said Sena, who then began to tell us her ghost story, full of confidence...

.....

.....

...and then she finished.

"...So?"

Yozora said in a voice that clearly showed she wasn't scared in the least.

Tears formed in the corners of Sena's eyes as we all stared at her apathetically.

"Uuu~ Why are none of you scared...!?"

I could barely believe how not scary her story was.

The main point of the story was that a beautiful girl who suddenly came to visit the main character was actually the ghost of a girl he killed, which is set up like a proper ghost story, but the way Sena told it ruined the whole thing.

She told the whole thing in an energetic voice, and every now and then would throw in a "Ahaha, isn't this guy a total idiot?" or some other comment.

In the final scene where the guy is killed by the ghost, she said " Ahaha! That's what you get, iiiiidiot!" as part of her narration...

"Well, I think the story itself was made well-enough."

I tried to cheer her up, but that just seemed to make her more annoyed.

"What's with that condescending attitude... Do you have any good ghost stories then? Huh?"

...Looks like my turn is finally here.

I'm not really that knowledgeable about ghost stories, but I did think up my own original one not too long ago.

Honestly, I'm pretty confident that I can scare everyone good with it.

"...Alright, I'll let you guys hear my ghost story then. It's called: ' The Terrifying Miso Soup'."

Thwack!

Yozora hit me on the head with her flyswatter without saying a word.

Sena was giving me a cold stare too.

"D-don't think it's a funny story just because of the title! This is a bona fide ghost story!"

Thus, I began telling "The Terrifying Miso Soup (my version, ghost story edition)" to everyone...

"Fuahyahyahya, I-I can't breathe, w-w-why was Augus- why was Augustine, pfffft- Hyahhyahyafuahya! W-w-w-why did the

mom put that in there!? Why did the mom put Augustine's head in there!? Ahyahyahyahya! Where did she even get it from!? Ahyahahaha, haha, c-can't breathe, ue, huehiehya!"

Maria was holding her sides exploding with laughter when I finished my story.

"W-why are you laughing...?"

I was taken aback when Maria made the exact same reaction she made when I told her "The Terrifying Miso Soup (joke version)", and when I looked around at the others, all I found were pitiful stares.

"Kodaka... why are you so hopeless?"

"I'm sorry Senpai. Rika doesn't know what face to make at a time like this... should I laugh?"

Even Yukimura said, "I did not understand Aniki's story at all. I still have much to learn..." with a sad expression on his face.

"An-chan... that was so embarrassing..."

Kobato hung her head down, her face completely red.

"C-come on, wouldn't that be scary? Seeing St. Augustine's head in your miso soup would be ridiculously scary, wouldn't it!?"

I said, utterly confused, to which Sena replied with a reproachful look in her eyes,

"Haa... Your stories don't work because the punch line is always too surreal, idiot."

"I see, so basically they're too high level?"

""Like hell they are!!""

Sena and Yozora both yelled at the same time.

Hrm... You guys have the weirdest taste in stories...

"...Anyway, is there anyone else who has a story?"

Yozora asked with an exhausted look on her face.

The only ones who haven't told a story other than Yozora are Maria and Kobato, but it doesn't look like they have one anyway.

"Hmph... then after I finish my story we'll go on our test of courage."

"Fine. Hurry up and tell your story then Yozora, not that I'm expecting much from you."

Sena said, and Yozora began telling her story.

"This is just a story my friend told me, but..."

"Since when do you have friends?"

"Shut it, Meat."

Yozora glared at Sena for interrupting her.

"...This story's protagonist is, well let's call her A-ko... She went to a certain public middle school... She also had a friend whose name was... let's just go with Y-ko. A-ko and Y-ko just happened to get seated next to each other in class, and ever since then they were friends who did everything together..."

Yozora told her story in a deep and somewhat gloomy voice.

It was basically how she usually talked, but it was perfect for telling a ghost story.

"...By the way, there was a certain urban legend that was popular at their school... It was a story called 'Yamiko' about a young girl's ghost..."

We all gulped, and continued listening to Yozora's story.

Yozora's voice already had a certain scariness to it, and as she went on it only got more and more ominous sounding.

According to the story, Yamiko was a girl who had committed suicide after being bullied, and it was her friend who bullied her enough to drive her to do it.

Thus it was said, that Yamiko would possess anyone betraying a friend and kill them...

A-ko and Y-ko got along, but one day they began fighting over a boy, which led to a crack forming in their friendship. A-ko was

outgoing and had plenty of other friends besides Y-ko, and eventually began bullying Y-ko, who was a very timid girl.

The bullying got worse and worse each day, and eventually Y-ko killed herself in a toilet stall in the old school building after being constantly bullied by A-ko and her friends.

At first A-ko regretted what she'd done, but as time passed on she slowly began to forget about Y-ko.

However, ever since then weird things began happening around A-ko.

At first, A-ko thought it was merely somebody's prank, but as the things happening got more and more serious, it was clear someone held a grudge against A-ko.

A-ko didn't suspect it being somebody else at that point, for she knew it was the spirit of Yamiko who had cursed her.

A-ko begged for forgiveness, but Yamiko ignored her and continued to harass A-ko, eventually cornering her within the same toilet stall Y-ko had killed herself in.

A-ko locked the toilet's door, and happened to look up, where she saw Y-ko's dead body, hanging by the neck, glaring down at her...

"...Nobody ever saw A-ko again after that... Many more people went missing at that school, and the school was eventually torn down. The ruins of that school currently lie beneath a forest... And

the forest they lie below... is none other than the one behind this very villa..."

The second Yozora finished her story the candles in the room all went out, and the room turned pitch black.

"

Gyaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

The screams of the Neighbors Club echoed throughout the room.

"...So, ready to go have our test of courage?"

Yozora coolly said after turning the lights on.

However, not a single one of us began to stand up.

Maria and Kobato were both shaking while clinging to my arms , and it took even me a while to open my mouth.

"H-hey, Yozora... why don't we call it quits? It's not safe going out when it's so dark..."

"Y-y-y-yeah, you never know what might happen!"

I said, to which Sena agreed, and Rika and Yukimura both quickly shook their heads up and down.

"...What, are you guys scared?"

"A-as if I'd be scared of a stupid story like yours! B-besides, I've never heard of there ever being a school here, and if I think about it there are lots of other strange parts too!"

"That's because it's a story passed down by hearsay... It's understandable that there might be a few spots that are wrong here and there... I suppose I can't stop you if you want to think it was all a lie..."

"I-I told you, that made-up story isn't scary at all!"

Yozora was completely calm, but Sena was still yelling.

"Hmph..."

Yozora sighed with a look of pity in her eyes.

"Then we won't go on a test of courage? I never really cared either way, so it doesn't matter to me," Yozora asked all of us.

...Obviously, not a single person said we should still go.

After the ghost stories, we all took a bath and went to sleep in our rooms.

I turned off the lights, got in my futon, and closed my eyes.

Soon after, I could hear Yukimura's peaceful sleeping breath.

However, I on the other hand couldn't sleep even if I closed my eyes.

I should've been tired, but I couldn't get that story about Yamiko out of my head.

I don't actually believe in ghosts, and the story wasn't so scary that I couldn't sleep really, either.

But it seems like the combination of the story and Yozora's perfect scary voice left quite an impression on me.

Yamiko, who curses and then kills those who betray their friends.

10 years ago, I left town without saying a word to my best friend.

I wonder if he thinks I betrayed him...

shiver!!

"...!"

I closed my eyes, trying to ignore my body's shaking.

No matter how long I waited though, I still couldn't sleep.

Then, all of a sudden, I heard a tiny sound that went crrreeeeeaaaakk.

Startled, I opened my eyes, and saw that my door was slowly being opened.

My body was covered in goose bumps.

I-it can't be, Y-Yamiko...?

The door opened, and a single person's shadow entered into our room.

The shadow slowly made its way over to my futon.

I was terrified, and tightly shut my eyes closed.

I can't see it...!

If I can't see it, it doesn't exist...!

But... it came and shook my futon anyway.

Eeeeeek...!!

"...Kodaka. Hey, Kodaka."

...Huh?

I know that voice.

"...Sena?"

I opened my eyes and called out her name.

Standing near my futon was Sena in her pajamas.

"...What's wrong?"

"C-come with me for a little bit..."

Sena said, seemingly embarrassed, and while I thought it was odd, I got up and left the room without making a sound.

"So, what's wrong?"

I asked again in the hallway, and Sena eventually replied after fidgeting while blushing,

"...I-I want you to come to the bathroom with me."

"Bathroom...?"

"I-it's not like I'm scared or anything, okay? But, you know, better safe than sorry."

It looks like I'm not the only one scared by Yozora's story.

The bathroom. The place Y-ko killed herself, and the place A-ko was taken away by Yamiko at...

"...Why didn't you just get Yozora to go with you..."

I said, and Sena shot me a nasty glare.

"Because if I ask her she'd just make fun of me!"

"Yeah, you've got a point."

"S-so let's go! I can't... hold it in... much longer..."

"O-okay."

Sena and I walked down to the bathroom.

Sena went in, and I stood outside waiting for her.

"You're still there, right Kodaka?"

I could hear Sena's voice, along with other miscellaneous sounds, from inside the bathroom.

"Yeah, I'm here."

I replied, realizing how awkward this was.

I heard the sound of running water when Sena asked again.

"Kodaka, are you there?"

"I said I'm here two seconds ago."

"K-Kodaka! You're there, right!?"

Sena asked again in a voice that sounded like she was about to burst into tears.

I guess she couldn't hear me over the water.

"I said I'm here!"

"Answer me faster, idiot!"

...I lost count of how many times Sena asked to make sure I was still there before she came out again.

When we got back to her room, Sena glared at me with a beet red face.

"Y-you better not tell Yozora about this, okay? If you tell her I'll kill you, got it!?"

"Yeah yeah..."

I gave a reply mixed with a sigh, and went back to my room.

Maybe it was because of having to deal with Sena, but I wasn't scared at all anymore, and was ready to go to sleep.

Good, now I can get a good night's sleep...

...However, that relief lasted but a moment.

The door to our room opened again, and somebody came in.

"An-chaaan..."

The person next to me who looked to be on the verge of tears was Kobato.

"...What's wrong, Kobato?"

"Come with me to the bathroom..."

"....."

Kobato asked, fidgeting like Sena did, so I sighed and got up again.

I took Kobato to the bathroom, and flopped back into my futon ready to go to bed for real.

But, I felt wide awake, and couldn't seem to fall asleep.

Even so, I kept my eyes shut, and just as I was starting to feel sleepy again,

Crrrreeeaaakkkk...

You gotta be kidding me...

This time it was Maria.

"...Want me to go to the bathroom with you?"

I quickly got up and asked, which made Maria's eyes go wide in surprise.

"Ohh!? How did you know? Onii-chan you're so awesome!"

...And so, I took Maria to the bathroom.

"Onii-chan, are you there!?"

"Yeah~... I'm here~..."

Maria asked me that more times than I could count, and each time I answered while stifling my yawn.

...By the way, Maria didn't have to just pee, but do the other one too.

"Onii-chan are you there!?"

"Zzzz..."

"Ueh!? Onii-chan! Onii-chan!?"

"Hwah!? Ah, I-I'm here! Just calm down and take your dump!"

...After this and that, I took Maria back to her room, went back to mine, and closed my eyes ready to go to sleep, this time for sure.

But, yet again somebody came into our room.

"Yeah yeah, I know. Come on, let's go to the bathroom."

"Huh? Bathroom? Rika simply came here for some late night sex ."

"Leave!"

I grabbed Rika by the collar and threw her out.

Thanks to Rika acting like an idiot I was wide awake again.

But, at least now there shouldn't be anyone else who'll come wake me up.

Relieved, I closed my eyes, and after a short while, finally got sleepy.

.....Geh.

...As soon as I got sleepy, I had to go pee too. I wish I would've gone to the bathroom when I was taking the rest of them...

Regretting my actions, I slowly opened the door to our room.

"Kya!?"

"Owah!?"

For some reason Yozora was standing right outside our room, and we both yelled in surprise. She just said "Kya!"... that isn't like her at all...

"O-oh it's just you, Kodaka. What is it?" Yozora said, blushing.

"I'm going to the bathroom, you?"

"I-I'm doing the same."

"Eh? But..."

There was something off about her reply just now.

If Yozora were going to the bathroom, she should've reached it before making it down to our room.

"S-since we're here we might as well go together, Kodaka."

Yozora seemed to be pretty flustered, so I asked to confirm my suspicions.

"...You're not so scared of that Yamiko story that you can't go to the bathroom alone are y-"

"O-o-o-o-of course I'm not!!"

Seems like I hit the bullseye.

"...Why are you scared of that Yamiko story too... You're the one who came up with it."

"How can you scare other people with a ghost story you don't think is scary yourself!? I had to perfectly imagine the whole story in my head as I was telling it! If anything I should be more scared than you guys who only had to listen!"

Yozora yelled back at my criticism.

Just then, Yozora's body shook and she started trembling.

"A-a-a-anyway, let's go already, Kodaka."

Thus, Yozora, who was squirming as we walked, and I, went to the bathroom.

I let Yozora go first since she seemed to be at her limit, which left me on standby in the hallway again.

"K-Kodaka, you're there right!?"

"I'm here!"

I could hear a rummaging sound from inside the bathroom.

"Kodaka."

"I'm here~ Can you hurry it up? I've gotta go too."

"O-okay."

Yozora came out a short while later, and I went inside.

I could hear Yozora's voice from the other side of the door.

"I'll wait here until you're done too, Kodaka."

"I'm fine, you don't have to bother."

"Mu... does that story not scare you, Kodaka?"

"Nope, I'm totally fine."

To be precise, I was scared of it, but now I couldn't care less.

"I see... so you weren't scared..."

Yozora said in a sulky voice to my reply.

By the time I finished and got back to my room, the sky was starting to lighten up.

And so, the second day of the Neighbors Club's training camp ended.

We're going home on the third day after we eat breakfast, so this is pretty much the end of the trip.

The things we all did together were limited to eating, yelling " The seaaaaa!", telling ghost stories, and cancelling a test of courage .

While looking back and thinking it was a very Neighbors Club-like training camp, I went to sleep at long last.

Summer Festival

It was less than a week before the end of summer break.

The members of the Neighbors Club were lazing around the clubroom as usual.

I was working on my summer homework, Yozora and Kobato were reading, Sena was playing galge, Rika was playing a BL game, Yukimura was just standing there, and Maria was sleeping.

"...Oh yeah, I forgot."

Yozora said all of a sudden, lifting her head from the book she was reading.

"Tomorrow's the day the Tohya Station shopping district holds its summer festival at that shrine nearby."

A summer festival, huh...

Back when I was a kid I helped carry the moving shrines, but other than that I never really went to summer festivals.

Since going to a festival without any friends would be boring...

As I was thinking that in my head, I waited for Yozora to continue, but

"....."

Yozora didn't look like she was about to start talking again at all .

Instead, she licked her finger and turned the page in her book.

"Umm, is that it?"

Sena asked with a surprised look on her face.

"What do you mean?"

Yozora tilted her head in confusion.

"You just said there's a summer festival down at the shrine in the shopping district, didn't you?"

"I did. I just happened to remember that I saw a bunch of paper lanterns on the way here."

"So that's it...? I was thinking you'd say we should all go there together..."

Sena said, looking a little let down.

"Why do I have to go out of my way to a place full of people?"

Yozora made a face that showed she hated the very idea from the bottom of her heart.

"That's exactly right."

Rika lifted her head up from her laptop's screen, and nodded repeatedly.

"Rika always wanted to go to a certain doujinshi festival held twice a year, but when I got on the train it was way too crowded, and I got off after one stop. Ever since then I've been aware that I'm bad with festivals."

I've seen that doujinshi event Rika mentioned in the news before.

It always lasts three days, with hundreds of thousands of people coming.

I've seen it on TV, and the people there look really intense, so I'm sure even someone who can handle crowds unlike Rika or Yozora would have a hard time.

"But don't people go to that festival because of all the rare stuff you can only get there? Don't you want to get a copy for yourself?"

I asked, having just realized that little problem.

"Ouch, that's a delicate spot you just hit there, Senpai. Girls don't like it if you do it too quick and make it hurt, you know. Please be gentle to your first, ok?"

"Quit trying to drag your dirty jokes into this."

I said, disgusted, to which Rika made a serious face and said,

"But if you take Rika's dirty jokes away what else is there?"

"There's plenty, isn't there!? Like how you're a genius inventor, and a scientist, and are kinda cool, and wear glasses and stuff... Have some more confidence in yourself."

"Those are all to give people a different impression of myself so that the dirty jokes stick out even more. Dirty jokes are Rika's bread and butter."

"Why are you so hooked on dirty jokes!?"

You'd be so much cuter if you didn't do that... It's such a waste...

"By the way, for stuff that doesn't get sold in a shop later, I have an acquaintance pick it up for me. Usually someone from the game company I work at or something. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that that's the only reason Rika works at that game company."

"Oh? You really plan ahead to cover for your hikikomori tendencies."

"Ehe~"

Rika puffed her chest out in pride slightly.

"...Although I wish you'd just stop being a hikikomori entirely."

"Ahh, that would be impossible."

"At least try. I dunno about doujinshi, but when you get that one thing you were after at a bargain or limited time offer, it feels pretty good. The harder you work to get something the more rewarding it is."

"I see... Kodaka-senpai, you're surprisingly aggressive, aren't you?"

"...Well, I suppose you might be right about that."

"You're not a dog that's satisfied with being given food; you're like a proud wolf who only sees value in things gained using your own power... or rather, a proud hawk!"[1]

"...T-that doesn't sound too bad."

I was a little embarrassed.

"...Hmm, it might be a good idea to switch from the 'Devour me, the Defenseless Little Rabbit' route to the 'Ufufu, Catch me if You Can~' route now..."

"What are you talking about..."

I sighed at Rika, who was probably imagining something I don't want to know about.

"H-hey, Kodaka."

Sena called out to me.

"Hm?"

"Do you think that... a-at summer festivals they have takoyaki stands?"

Sena asked, seemingly embarrassed for some reason.

"Well, if they've got stands then a takoyaki one is practically a given."

"I see... takoyaki..."

Sena murmured with a spaced out expression on her face.

"Do you like takoyaki?"

"I-is there something wrong with that!?"

"Of course not, I love takoyaki too. Back when I lived in Osaka, I couldn't really fit in with our neighbors or the people at school, so whenever I was feeling down Dad would buy me some takoyaki from a famous shop that'd cheer me up in an instant.

"Hey, hold it Kodaka, I might like it, but I'm not that crazy about it, ok!? I just like it because of the taste like any normal person!"

Sena said, flustered for some reason after my more serious comment.

"You don't have to be shy about it, takoyaki is great stuff."

"No, it's not that I'm acting shy..."

"Takoyaki is amazing. Good takoyaki can free someone from all their troubles... Actually, I kinda have a thing against people who sell crappy takoyaki like it's no big deal..."

"Eek...!?"

Sena backed away from me with a scared look on her face for some reason.

As she did, Kobato came over and started tugging on the sleeve of my shirt.

"Kukuku... I'll forgive you for not offering me any takoyaki in a long time if you're careful..."

"What, you want to eat some takoyaki, Kobato?"

"Takoyaki!? Onii-chan, I want to eat takoyaki too!"

Said Maria, who was sleeping on the couch and sprang up all of a sudden, while still wiping the drool from her mouth.

Kobato and Maria both gave me crazy stares.

"Hrm... Then wanna go together? To that festival tomorrow."

""Yeah!!""

Kobato and Maria both yelled full of energy, and then glared at each other.

"Mu... Why are you going too, abominable pawn of God..."

"I want to go with just me and Onii-chan! You can stay at home, poop vampire!"

"Ughhh!"

"Fghhh!!"

I pulled them apart and gave them a little warning.

"If you can't get along, then we aren't going."

"Kh... I have no choice... Joining hands with one of God's servants is a small price to pay for takoyaki..."

"Me too! I'd sell my soul to the devil for takoyaki!"

Both Kobato and Maria replied.

It worries me how easily they give up their beliefs when it comes to food...

As I was worrying about them, Sena raised her hand.

"Hey! I might as well go too if all of you are! I want to eat takoyaki too!"

"Sounds good to me."

Then Yukimura said in his calm voice, "Aniki, I too wish to accompany you."

"Sure, then the five of us can go together."

"Ok." answered Yukimura in an upbeat tone of voice.

"Heheheh" went Sena as a big smile crept onto her face.

"H-hold on, Kodaka!" "Please wait, Senpai."

Yozora and Rika both yelled out in a hurry.

"I'm going to that festival, too." "Rika is going to the festival, too. "

"Huh...? Aren't you guys bad with crow-..."

I started to ask, when they yelled back in harmony,

"It's for the takoyaki!" "It's for the takoyaki!"

I can certainly understand wanting to get some takoyaki no matter what, so I left it at that.

And so, before I knew it, it was the next day just before seven at night.

Kobato and I arrived at the bookstore in front of Tohya Station's shopping district, which is where we had decided to meet up.

It's a fairly big shop that I stop at on the way home from school every now and then, and also relatively close to the shrine where the festival is being held.

By the time we got there, Yozora, Yukimura, Rika, and Maria were all there already, waiting.

"Umm... D-do you think it looks good on me?"

Rika said, acting shy.

Seeing Rika in something other than a lab coat was a rare, and I mean really rare sight for her.

She was wearing a yukata, and had her hair down instead of in a ponytail like usual.

She looked like the typical pretty long black haired girl, and the yukata fit her so well I could barely recognize her.

"Wow... so you can do it if you try..."

"Muu~ What's that supposed to mean? Please give me a more direct compliment."

Rika cutely puffed out her cheeks upon hearing my response.

"You look ridiculously good in that."

I decided to tell her my honest feelings.

When I did, Rika's cheeks went red as she said,

"I-it's too embarrassing if you're that blunt about it, stupid Senpai."

"What do you want me to do then? Make up your mind."

As for everyone else, Yukimura was in a yukata too... which was of course a girl's one that looked way too good on him.

Maria was in a mini yukata with short sleeves, which looked good on her too. Yozora was in a shirt and jeans, giving her that gender neutral look she always goes with.

Kobato and I were in our normal clothes.

The reason being that we didn't have any yukatas to wear, and even if we did I doubt I'd have the courage to ride the train here while wearing one.

"So the only one left is Meat, huh? That's perfect, let's go then."

Said Yozora, who looked to be in a grumpy mood as she leaned against the bookstore's wall with her arms crossed.

"What do you mean 'that's perfect'? Stupid Yozora."

A voice came from behind.

When I turned around, I saw it was Sena in a yukata.

She didn't look very Japanese, but that flashy flower-pattern yukata fit her so well it was scary.

I was so captivated that I stood there just staring at her.

Smack!

Getting hit on the head from behind out of the blue like that brought me back to my senses.

Yozora was the one who smacked me.

"What was that for?"

"Nothing much. Anyway, let's get going."

Yozora seemed to have gotten even more grumpy all of sudden said as she started to quickly walk away.

"Ah, hey, wait for us!"

We all hurriedly followed after Yozora.

The shrine was full of people, just like you'd expect it to be.

There were goldfish scooping and shooting gallery stands set up, and there were tons of good smells coming from the food stalls , which included our sought after takoyaki.

I hadn't eaten dinner, so I wanted to go and buy something to eat right away, but before that we decided to rest under a tree a short ways away from the festival with no people near it, since Yozora and Rika asked to take a short break with tired looks on their faces.

"...Kodaka, what's this all about?"

Sena asked in an annoyed voice all of a sudden while we were resting.

"Eh, what do you mean?"

"I'm talking about Kobato-chan! Why isn't she wearing a yukata even though we came all the way out to this festival? Are you kidding me?"

"It's not like you have to wear one to festivals."

You could see tons of other people not wearing yukatas in the crowd.

Honestly there weren't even that many people wearing them. It felt like at best 40% of the girls and 20% of the guys had one on.

"Who cares what all those commoners do! I want to see Kobato-chan in a yukata!"

"Like I care! Besides, neither of us even has one!"

"Then go buy one this instant! This is common sense damn it!"

"Why should I waste money on something I'm hardly ever going to wear!?"

After I said that I heard a voice from my side,

"Senpai, I saw a second-hand shop on the way here that looked like it was renting yukatas."

Rika's words made Sena's eyes shine as bright as the sun.

"We're going there now! And getting you a yukata! Kobato-chan, you want to wear a cute yukata too, right~?"

Kobato then looked at Sena, me, and Maria before giving a little nod.

"...Alright, I suppose we might as well since we're out here."

"Yeah...!"

Kobato nodded again with a tiny, but happy smile.

As she did, Maria's stomach grumbled.

"Hey~ Hey~... I want to eat some takoyaki."

"Kukuku... You can spend the rest of eternity here..."

Kobato laughed at her, but leaving Maria hungry and alone feels kind of wrong, so I asked Yukimura,

"Yukimura, can you go buy some takoyaki for Maria? We'll have some too when we get back, so grab at least 4 and some other stuff you think looks good too if you don't mind."

"Very well."

Yukimura said in a lively voice.

"I shall gladly serve as your errand boy, Aniki."

I have yet to discover why being an errand boy is so fun, but no sooner had I asked than had Yukimura walked off into the crowd of people.

"Ok, let's go get those yukatas now!"

Sena said, pushing us along.

"Come on, you're coming too."

She called out to Yozora.

Yozora had a surprised look on her face for a second, but she quickly shook her head.

"I don't need a yukata."

"Honestly, you do look half-decent and all, so don't you think it'd be a waste to not wear one?"

"Yeah, you'd definitely look good in a yukata," I added.

I was in complete agreement with Sena. A pretty Japanese girl with long black hair like Yozora would probably look the best in a yukata out of all the Neighbors Club members.

"...I-I'm fine. I don't like wearing those kinds of clothes."

Yozora's face went a little red before she quickly turned away from us.

I wasn't sure if "those kinds of clothes" just meant yukatas themselves or something else, but if the person herself doesn't want to wear one then there's nothing we can do about it.

Thus, Kobato, Sena, and I headed to the second-hand shop as a group of three.

The second-hand shop was easy to find, and while it was fairly busy we didn't have to wait long before renting our yukatas.

The salesperson helped me put mine on, and I ended up waiting at the entrance for Sena and Kobato.

I've only really worn one when I was a kid, but I do think Japanese clothes are pretty nice to wear.

Ever since I saw Sena's father, Pegasus Kashiwazaki, wearing traditional Japanese clothes, I'd been thinking about how I wanted to try wearing the same kind of thing too, so getting the chance to do that now feels really satisfying.

After waiting a while, Kobato came out in a mini yukata like the one Maria had on along with Sena, who had a look of ecstasy on her face.

"An-chan... how do I look?"

Kobato asked, tilting her neck.

"Cute! Cute cute cute too cute so cute I want to eat you up! Haa haa..."

That was of course Sena speaking, not me.

"It looks good on you."

I pet Kobato on the head and she made a tender smile.

"You know, you... umm... I've got this sense of déjà vu when I look at you..."

Sena looked at me and made an odd face.

"Hmm, what was it..."

"?"

"Hmm..... Ah, I know! You look just like this stupid guy I saw on the news who went nuts and got arrested at a coming-of-age ceremony!"

"Wha...!?"

And to think I liked this outfit...

Honestly, that was quite a blow to me.

"Well, nobody really cares about your clothes anyway. Come on , let's go Kodaka, our takoyaki is waiting for us."

Sena started walking away, oblivious to my feelings, and I simply hung my head as we left the store.

As we were walking in a line that went Kobato, me, then Sena back to the shrine,

"So hey, you know, that weird hair of yours is a problem."

"Hair...?"

"If you did something about that hair of yours that looks like a failure of a pudding, I bet even a yukata would look normal on you. You do have that evil look to your eyes which might make you look like a Yakuza instead, but it'd still be better than how you look now."

...A "failure of a pudding"? That hurts...

"Actually, isn't the main reason people think you're a delinquent at school because of that hair? Why don't you just dye it all black?"

Sena's words put a bitter smile on my face.

"I know that dying my hair would help things a lot, and a long time ago I did think about doing it, but..."

I said, which made Sena make a confused face.

"When why don't you dye it? School rules?"

"No."

...Ah man... what should I do here?

This isn't something I really want to talk about.

I guess it's ok since Sena knows about our family though...

"...You know that our mom isn't with us anymore, right?"

"Ah... yeah," Sena said, nodding awkwardly.

I could tell Kobato's face clouded over too.

"I've got black eyes like my dad, and my skin is kinda dark like his too. It's like, I don't look very half-Japanese... I do wish I had all blond hair like our mom's like this one here has though."

I said while rubbing the Kobato's head as she silently walked along.

"...But even so, this is pretty much the only thing you can see on me that I got from our mom. So for me, dying it would be like rejecting the thing that ties me to her."

If you wanted to make a big deal out of it, you could say that to me, my hair is proof of my bond with our mother.

"...Even if it causes me a bunch of hardship, I still think it's not something I should reject."

I didn't plan on saying all that, but somehow the words just found their way out.

"Kodaka..."

Sena stopped walking, and stared at me.

She then said,

"You really aren't like all those other guys, are you?"

She flashed me a smile that sent my heart racing, and then started walking quickly in front of us.

When we got back, Maria had already devoured her takoyaki, among other things.

The takoyaki, hot dog, yakisoba, fried squid, roasted corn, etc...

Every single container was at least half-empty.

"You bought so much... and Maria, you ate all this?"

I was shocked, but Maria, who had sauce all around her mouth, just looked over at me with a big smile on her face as she stuffed more takoyaki into her mouth and said,

"Ahya! Onii-hyan you're bachh!"

"Finish your food before you talk, Maria."

Gulp.

"Onii-chan, you're back! This place is amazing! Is this heaven!?"

So she said, as she reached out, this time for the fried squid.

"How much are you going to eat..."

Yozora said with a fed-up look on her face as she slowly licked away at a candied apple.

"Nchu... slurp slurp... nn... nnahh... ah, Kodaka-senpai, you guys can have some too."

Rika said while licking a chocolate banana.

"Nn... slurp... puahh..."

She kept on shoving it in and out of her mouth while licking it from the bottom to the top. It looked really weird.

隣人部 夏休みの風景

"Why are you eating it like that..."

"It's practice so I look sexy when I eat bananas. Did it get you horny?"

"Not in the least."

I said, as we all started eating.

I'll start with takoyaki, since that's what we came here for. I stuck a toothpick into one of the takoyaki, and brought it to my mouth.

.....Strange.

Even if you ignore the fact that it's a little cold after sitting out for a while, this is strange.

The batter tastes weird, it isn't fried very well, and most importantly, there's hardly any octopus. I can't believe this.

Despite that, Maria was enjoying it, and neither Sena nor Kobato looked unsatisfied either.

I'll have to teach them what real takoyaki tastes like...

...I wonder how much a takoyaki frying pan would cost me.

"Hey~ hey~ Onii-chan! What's the stuff that looks like a cloud!?"

Maria pointed at another group of the festival's visitors.

It was a group of girls eating cotton candy as they walked by.

"That's called cotton candy."

"Cotton candy? Is it cotton or is it candy!?"

"It's candy."

"Ohh~ So that cotton stuff is candy~ That's pretty weird!"

"Want to try some? The cotton candy I mean."

"Can I!?"

"I was more asking if you could even eat anymore."

Maria, who had eaten a considerable amount of food by now, answered,

"I'm fine! The old hag told me I could eat as much as I want today! She even gave me 1000 yen in pocket money! I'm gonna eat until I'm sick!"

"Just don't overdo it."

I chuckled at Maria, whose eyes were sparkling.

By the way, the amount of food Maria had eaten so far was obviously over 1000 yen.

After buying some cotton candy and baby castella cake and eating all of it, we were all feeling full.

"Ok, now that we've filled our stomachs..."

"Go home?" "Shall we go home?"

Yozora and Rika both said in response to Sena.

"Eh!? Go home!?"

"We already ate our takoyaki, we don't have any other reason to be here, do we?"

Yozora coolly said to Sena who was in a flurry.

"T-that might be true, but since we're all here I thought we could do something..."

"What, Meat? Do you want to go goldfish scooping or ring tossing at your age?

"T-that's not what I meant, but... it *is* a ruler's job to join the commoners in their recreation..."

While she was muttering something,

"Actually, wait, you just want to go home because you're scared of losing to me at all the games here, aren't you!?"

Sena started to provoke Yozora, but she casually said,

"I said that I don't like being in crowds of people. You have an awful memory, Meat."

"Uu..."

"...But, this is much better than that pool was. It might not be a bad idea to give this uppity piece of meat a taste of reality..."

Yozora glared at Sena, and sparks started flying between them.

"T-then let's go. First is, let's see... I've been wanting to- I mean, let's start with goldfish scooping!"

...Somehow things ended up this way, so the rest of us followed Sena and Yozora into the shrine's grounds.

"Hehe, your goddess has come to save you, little goldfish."

"Hmph... I'll crush those pathetic delusions of yours. I'm the real god here."

Sena and Yozora said at the goldfish scooping stand as they paid the owner and each took a bowl.

"I don't think I have to say it, but just to be sure, whoever catches the most wins."

"I know."

Sena said, to which Yozora nodded.

"...Sena, you do know this is goldfish *scooping* not goldfish *saving* right?"

I quietly mentioned.

"Generally goldfish who don't get scooped out by the end of the festival get turned into manure or other fish products, so I don't think saying she's saving them is necessarily wrong."

Rika casually said.

"Really...? Goldfish have it rough too, huh..."

Shortly after, Sena and Yozora's battle began.

"Ei!" "Yah!"

They both yelled full of spirit as they went into the fish tank... which obviously ended in their paper nets ripping because they put too much strength into it.

"What's with this crappy net!? It totally broke!"

"...Well yeah, 'cause it's made of paper. Goldfish scooping is about scooping out the goldfish without letting it break."

I said, pointing out the obvious.

They both quickly bought new nets, but neither of them could really get the hang of it. They kept of failing, getting more serious, and spending more and more money. I'm sure the old guy running the stand loved them.

"Ahh, geez! If you don't let me save you this instant I'll kill you, damn goldfish!"

"To think you, little fish, barely worth a few yen fee to catch you would make me spend 600 yen...!" Sena and Yozora both started getting pissed and yelling at the fish.

"Ahh, come on! Give me ten nets at once!"

Sena handed the owner a 1000 yen bill, and got 10 nets all at once.

Sena gathered them all up in one hand, and swung at the fish.

A bunch of them broke, but she managed to get one goldfish into her bowl.

"Wha...!? You cheater!!"

"Heh heh, this is just my strategy."

"You just used money to win god damn it!"

Yozora complained about Sena's methods, but Sena simply kept on happily staring at the fish she caught.

"...I wish you'd refrain from doing that in the future... I'll let it slide this time, so do you mind going somewhere else now?"

The old guy running the stand said with a tired look on his face.

No matter how much money they were giving him, causing such a big ruckus in front of his shop can't be good for business, so I can see why he'd want to get rid of them as fast as possible.

Thus, the battle of goldfish scooping technically ended in Sena's victory.

"Hehe, you should be thankful."

Sena said lovingly to the black pop-eyed goldfish she was carrying in a take-home plastic bag.

"Let's see~ From now on your name is Kandata. Be grateful for it."

Sena had a big grin on her face, but Yozora still looked angry as she said,

"Meat. We're doing that next."

Yozora pointed at a katanuki stand.

"Heh heh, it's obvious I'll win no matter what we do anyway though. Right Kandata♥"

They both walked over to the katanuki stand.

I sighed and started to go with them, but Rika pulled on the sleeve of my yukata.

"Kodaka-senpai, want to ditch them and go do our own thing?"

"....."

After thinking for a short while,

".....Yeah, let's do that." I nodded in agreement.

Rika, Yukimura, Kobato, Maria and I went around to the various stands.

Kobato and Maria fought over every little thing like Yozora and Sena did, but they were much cuter compared to those two.

They both got a water balloon with rubber bands attached from one stand, and were happily bouncing them up and down.

Yukimura and I were mainly there to carry stuff.

Rika won a bunch of stuff from the shooting gallery, and it fell on us to haul it around.

There was a stuffed animal, fireworks set, candies, figures, video games... and the newest game system, the PS3.

I always thought those game systems were there to get people to come and would never fall down, but I guess they do if you try hard enough.

...It might've just been my imagination, but the sound of the gun seemed louder when she hit the PS3.

By the way, the guy running the stall made a pale face that said "That's impossible..." when it happened.

"Now that I think about it, Rika already has a PS3. You can have this one, Senpai, since having two is pointless."

"Seriously?"

"Yes. Please think of this as if it were Rika herself and play with it every day."

"I dunno if I can take something this big... Let's set it up in the clubroom instead."

"No wayyyyy~"

As we chatted and walked around, we ran into Yozora and Sena again.

They were both carrying a bunch of prizes.

"Kodaka! Where did you go!? I thought you'd carry all this stuff ."

Sena complained to me.

Yozora did the same,

"These prizes are in the way and we can't continue our match. Help me carry this stuff, Kodaka."

"No can do, just look at me."

I held up the prizes I was already carrying.

"A-a PS3...!?"

Yozora was speechless after eyeing the PS3 among the prizes.

"Just call me Bullseye Rika."

Rika said full of pride, which made Yozora and Sena look at each other and then sigh.

"Haa... Looks like we'll end here then. Carrying this all on the bus or train back will probably be a pain, so I'll have Stella come pick us up in the car," said Sena.

"Hmph... That's fine, I highly doubt you would've come back and won even if we continued..."

"What're you talking about? I had a 1 win lead on you."

"That first goldfish scooping one doesn't count, you idiot."

"Why not!? Financial power is still my own power!"

"Who're you kidding? You should be thankful I didn't make you lose automatically for cheating, you damn swine!"

Yozora and Sena continued their noisy argument as they walked and carried all the prizes they won.

It makes me wonder how many stand owners they nearly brought to tears with their little competition.

Anyway, that's how we ended up leaving the festival grounds.

After we returned the yukatas we rented, we gathered up at a tiny park just outside the shopping district.

Stella, the steward of the Kashiwazaki family, said she was coming to pick us up, so we were waiting for her at the park.

Although, she had to come from the Kashiwazaki estate, so even if the roads were nearly empty it'd take her a good 30 minutes to get here, giving us plenty of time to kill.

We decided to gather up the tons of prizes we won into one big pile.

Yozora and Sena started some fight over who won the most stuff, but it didn't look like they had much interest in the prizes themselves.

The only special one was Kandata the goldfish, which Sena held onto like it was her treasure.

I noticed we had several fireworks within the spoils of war from earlier tonight.

Rika won a big set of fireworks at the shooting gallery, and it looks like Yozora and Sena won some too.

"Hey, wanna set off some fireworks while we're out here? We've got a bunch of 'em and all."

I suggested, which prompted a "Fireworks!?" from Kobato and Maria with their eyes sparkling.

"...I agree. They'll just get too damp to use if we don't use them now anyway. We haven't had any chances to do them before either ."

"I've never launched any fireworks except in galge, it sounds like fun."

Yozora and Sena said, in addition to Rika and Yukimura also agreeing, so we decided on setting off fireworks in the park.

Luckily, there was a convenience store nearby, so we were able to buy a bucket, wax candles, a lighter, and a bottle of tea.

We put the tea in the bucket, lit some of the candles on fire so we could put wax on the asphalt, and then stuck the other candles in the wax.

We each picked out a firework we liked, and took turns lighting it with the candles we set up.

Our seven fireworks made a crackling noise, and lit up the night with their vivid colors.

"Ohh~! Fireworks! Fireworks~! It's on fire! It's totally on fire! Ahahaha!"

Maria ran around swinging her sparkler around.

"Kukuku... You would do well to observe my secret demon blaze technique... Come and be burned to ashes by the flames of purgatory, Megiddo Flame...!"

Kobato lit a second firework, and starting doing a weird dance (she probably thought it looked cool) while holding them in both hands.

"Doing two at once? Not bad! I'll do that too!"

Maria copied Kobato, holding two fireworks as well.

"Don't copy me, moron!"

"I'm not copying! I look way cooler than you! This is a special holy technique given to me by God!"

Maria started doing her own weird dance in opposition to Kobato's.

"Kh, not bad... but you have much to learn...!"

"Ohh, that's a pretty cool pose! Ok, then I'll do this!"

"You impudent, little... Fine, I shall show you my ultimate black magic...!"

There they were, having some competition I'm not quite sure how one is supposed to win at.

"...You need a certain amount of skill to make fireworks, don't you... I think I'll make them my next research subject."

Rika said with a serious look, not budging an inch as she stared at the fireworks.

That's pretty "genius inventor girl"-like of her, maybe she's not so bad after all.

"The dreams of man are fleeting... and the life of a man is the same, disappearing in an instant much like a firework."

Yukimura quietly said while staring at his sparkler.

Why is he acting like this right from the get go...

"Triple Fireworks...!"

Yozora grabbed three fireworks in one hand and then lit them.

"Uwa, what a waste!"

"What's it matter? We have a bunch!"

Yozora said in a slightly upbeat voice.

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

My firework had just run out when I saw her do that, so I grabbed three fireworks and lit them all at the same time like Yozora did.

It's only obvious, but the pretty flames it shot out were much bigger now that I had three.

"Heh heh, that's still not enough! I'll light four of these big ones at once!" declared Sena.

Eh... big ones?

The fireworks of which Sena held two in each hand, were pretty fat ones that were about two centimeters in diameter.

They also each had a plastic plate on the bottom.

"You idi-! Wait, those are-!"

Before I could fluster my way over and stop her, Sena stuck the fireworks down by the candles on the ground and lit them.

"Uwa, Meat you idiot! Those ones aren't meant for holding in your hands!"

Yozora noticed what she was doing too, and backed away with a startled expression on her face.

Sena was holding the big kind of fireworks that you leave on the ground and watch from a distance.

And she was holding four of them at that.

"Eh...?"

Just as Sena's face went stiff, the four big fireworks let out a blast of flames that were much much bigger than the ones made to be held in one's hand.

"Wh- Eh- Whaaaaaa!? S-save meeeeeee!"

Sena ran over to Yozora, half in tears, while shooting flames out from her hands.

"S-stupid Meat! Stay away from me!"

"Don't say that, do something! It's hot~~"

"L-like I care!"

Yozora running away in a panic, and Sena chasing her in tears.

...Quite the strange scene.

They continued their stupidly dangerous game of tag until Sena's fireworks burned out.

Luckily the fireworks weren't made to last long, and it looked like neither of them had any burns.

"God damn, that idiot...!"

Yozora lit a new firework while breathing heavily.

Naturally that incident seemed to be a big shock to Sena, who sat alone on a swing in the corner of the park while the rest of us enjoyed the fireworks.

When we ran out of the smaller fireworks you could hold and moved to the bigger ones, Sena got up and watched from a slightly farther distance than the rest of us.

By the way, Yozora was the one using a lighter to light the big ones, and I'd like to believe that sadistic smile I saw on her face every time she went to light one was just the way the light from the flames happened to make her look.

We kept on going, doing this and that, and before we knew it we had used up most of our fireworks.

The only one left was the largest big-type firework we had that we all ended up calling "The Last Boss", which we then got ready to light.

Yozora set up The Last Boss on the ground, and the rest of us all gathered around it.

"Ok, here we go."

A happy smile rose to Yozora's face as she lit the fuse with the lighter, and then backed away.

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We all waited in anticipation, wondering what kind of crazy firework it'd turn out to be as the flame slowly burned its way across the fuse over to The Last Boss.

Then at last, it reached the end of the fuse, and-...

Pyuuuuuuuu, blup.

A single thread of light was launched high into the sky along with a high pitched noise before exploding with a dull sound and letting off some faintly shining light.

...Well, I can't say it wasn't pretty, but it felt like a let-down.

Everyone else had the same disappointed expression I did.

"...Hrm, that was as pathetic as Meat..."

"What's that supposed to mean!?"

Yozora said, showing her disappointment, before approaching The Last Boss. However as she did,

Hyuuuu, bang! Hyuuuu, bang! Hyubababang!

Hyuuuu, bang! Hyuubabang! Bababababang! Babang!

Pyuuu, bang! Bang! Bang! Babang! Bang! Bababang!

Several more blasts of light were launched out, each exploding in rapid succession.

Sparkle sparkle sparkle...

Each of the sparks had a different color, and after they had all exploded a sea of rainbow lights danced in the sky.

"Ohhhh!"

I let out a voice, dazzled by the spectacle.

"Hmph, just when I think you're pathetic you pull that off. Not bad Last Boss..."

Yozora stood still, staring up at the sky with a satisfied smile on her face.

"Heheh, see?" said Sena in a happy voice for some reason.

The stream of lights eventually subsided and then disappeared completely.

It had a tinge of melancholy to it, but that only made it that much more vivid.

"Phew," sighed somebody, which prompted Yozora into going over to The Last Boss.

However, as she went to grab it,

SHUUUUUUUUUU!!

"Uwa!?"

More fireworks came out from The Last Boss like a water fountain, which sent Yozora jumping back with a scream.

"There's still more!?"

"Powering up at the last minute when you think he's done for, he truly is a last boss..."

Rika said in a voice full of admiration.

The Last Boss continued to shoot out a rain of colorful flames as if to say "Allow me to show you my true power!" or something.

The newly revived Last Boss took about 30 more seconds to burn out completely.

...As for the overall impression of seeing the whole thing, well I guess I'd say it was average.

Honestly it had a lot of flashy colors, but it didn't really leave much of an impact on me.

Anyway, this time was really the end.

All that was left now was to put The Last Boss's corpse in our bucket of tea and clean up.

Today was... really fun.

I truly felt that way.

But then, all of a sudden,

The faint smell of something burning floated into my nose.

"Huh... do you guys smell something?"

"Well yeah, we just set off a bunch of firewo- Wait, huh? This doesn't quite smell like gunpowder."

Rika tilted her head.

"Gyahhhh!? H-hey, Yozora! Yozora your hair is on fire!"

Sena let out a scream.

--Yozora's hair was... indeed on fire.

On the end of her long black hair, there was smoke coming from a tiny red flame. It probably caught on fire when she was watching the The Last Boss from so close by.

"Eeeeek!?"

Obviously, even Yozora's face would be twisted in fear after realizing her hair was on fire.

"W-water! Water!"

I spat out in confusion.

"Aniki!" Yukimura ran over to me with our bucket.

"Thanks! Yozora turn around!"

Luckily, the fire wasn't that big yet.

I'll throw this on her and put it out right away!

"O-ok!"

Yozora turned around, and I threw our bucket of tea (which was filled to the brim with black, dirty liquid from all the fireworks in it) all over her.

The flames went "hssssss" and disappeared.

But unfortunately, Yozora's beautiful hair and clothes were in really bad shape.

Nobody said a word.

It was so quiet it hurt, but eventually,

"......I'm going home."

Yozora announced in an emotionless voice without so much as looking back at us, before slowly walking out of the park.

I don't know what kind of face she was making, but she looked incredibly fragile as I watched her from behind.

The rest of us all stood there silent, unable to move an inch until Yozora's silhouette faded into the darkness...

Translation Notes:

1. ↑ Kodaka's name has the character for Hawk (Taka) in it.

Epilogue: Reunion

About a week after the night of the summer festival...

Yozora hadn't come to the club room a single time since then.

I texted her afterwards and got a short reply, so I at least knew she made it home safe, but I still felt worried.

The Neighbors Club members still passed the time doing whatever they felt like, but the atmosphere felt darker somehow in those days without Yozora.

Before long, summer break finally came to an end.

It was the morning of September 1st.

Saint Chronica Academy works on a semester system, so it wasn't the start of a new term, but anyway it was the first day following summer break's end.

The homeroom teacher of class 2-5 Yozora and I were a part of was calling out student's names, taking attendance.

The seat in the third row from the windows and second from the back, that is to say Yozora Mikadzuki's seat, was empty.

"Tanabe."

"Here."

"Tsuda."

"Here."

"Hasegawa."

"...Here."

I could tell my reply scared the guy next to me. It might've been because my voice was too deep, but I didn't really care.

...The teacher finished calling the boys, and moved on to the girls.

"Nakabashi."

"Here"

"Nomura."

"Here."

"Hashimoto."

"Here~"

"Fujioka."

"Here."

"Matsuda."

"Here."

"Mikadzuki."

"Here."

Answered the girl who flung open the door to the classroom and walked in.

She clearly answered that *she was Yozora Mikadzuki*.

Of course, there was only one student in our class with that name, so it's only natural answering as such is the same as declaring "I am Yozora Mikadzuki."

Everyone in class started talking.

Part of it was probably due to her sudden, grand entrance, but I think more than that was the fact that *the girl who called herself Yozora Mikadzuki had short hair*.

In any case, that's how I felt.

To me, Yozora Mikadzuki = pretty girl with long black hair.

I'd say that that long black hair of hers was a big enough feature that everyone in class would recognize it.

But it was all gone now.

It was now short enough that it reached just past her neck.

I was thrown into confusion.

Sure, part of Yozora's hair got burned that night.

So of course I realize she'd have to cut it.

But the burnt part was only the tips at best, and there was certainly no need to cut it all off.

"Hm... Well, I guess I'll let this one slide. Hurry and take your seat."

"Ok."

So she was instructed by the teacher, and thus her face was turned to me as she walked to her seat.

As she walked, the distance between us grew shorter and shorter.

Does changing your hairstyle always leave this big an impact...?

Her short hair, and those imposing almond eyes of hers.

There was no doubt she was a beautiful girl, but she had an androgynous air to her.

Yozora's new face overlapped with a certain young boy's all of a sudden.

Clang!

I unconsciously jumped out of my seat.

I stood there and stared at Yozora, without realizing the awkward atmosphere I'd created.

A pretty young boy with an extremely good looking face.

The boy I parted with 10 years ago. The boy I betrayed, once my best friend.

I don't know his real name, he wouldn't tell me no matter what.

We always called each other by our nicknames, so knowing each other's real name didn't matter.

The name of that boy... No, that girl who I thought was a boy, was...

"————Sora?"

The instant that name flew out of my mouth as if it were only natural, Yozora stopped walking to her desk at once and looked at me.

And I saw it. In those eyes filled with tears, there was affection, longing, sadness, anger, hatred, joy, and hesitation. Amidst that overwhelming flurry of emotions, a smile rose to her face as she said to me,

"————It's been a long time, Taka."

Even a dense idiot with a terrible memory like me could clearly tell that the amount of time behind her words was not a mere week, but a full 10 years.

The End.

Afterword

And now "Haganai" volume 3, the Neighbors Club's summer break has concluded.

In the story, summer is the season of the Normals. I don't have any memory of fun summer breaks at all. While writing this book, thoughts about "I want to go to the beach or to the pool with friends too!" or "How does it feel going camping with everyone, I wonder..." suddenly flooding in left me in despair and tears.

No matter whether you are Normals, or not Normals, I'm very happy if you enjoyed this.

[Supplement]

In "The Silent Phone" chapter, the topic about SNS "nixi" is modeled from SNS "mixi" in the real world. mixi has canceled the invitation system since March, now it is possible to become a member even without any friends. Volume 1 "The Hunt" is also similar (the real "Monster Hunter" game doesn't allow killing your fellows). mixi became nixi, Monster Hunter became Monster Kariudo, along with other goods/works/characters/etc, please consider them to be purely fictional. But for "The Sacred Blackstar", I believe Miura-san will really write it someday.

[Notice]

As you already saw from the obi and the next page announcement, "Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai" will have a manga adaptation! Serialization will start in the May issue of Monthly Comic Alive, which will be on sale at the same time as this book.

Imagine this scene or that scene which weren't included in the original work, such as vomiting, or vomiting... Please check it out.

[Words of Thanks]

Buriki-san, who is in charge of illustrations, still continued supporting me with wonderful drawings. I'm really appreciative.

Everyone at MF Bunko J involved in the creation and marketing of this book, thank you very much for your support allowing this volume 3 to be released. Please take care of this troublesome author from now on too.

Lastly, for readers whom purchased volume 1 and 2, thanks to you, support on deciding to make a manga adaptation was higher than I expected, I'll continue to write interesting stories with my all , please keep following.

Let's meet again in volume 4.

Last day of February 2010, Hirasaka Yomi